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THE OTHER GATE

CHAPTER I

IT was nearly seven years since Josephine Delmar had said good-bye to Andrew Murison in Vienna. It had been a hurried parting in those days when war clouds were gathering black over Europe, and she had neither seen nor heard anything of him since. She had not sought for news because he was associated with an episode she had consistently tried to forget. Looking back upon it, it seemed to her that Josephine the girl of eighteen had nothing in common with Josephine the woman of twenty-five, so easy is it to outgrow our old selves, and sit in judgment on them.

But the past cannot be so readily shelved. It has a disconcerting way of cropping up at unexpected moments, and had done so to-day in the pages of Erasmus Langton's first novel. Of course, Erasmus could not, by any possibility, have had herself in mind when he drew his relentless picture of that heroine whose emotional history so closely resembled Josephine's own.

Erasmus was always too busy trying to find things in the clouds to see those which lay under his nose. He dealt in theories. This novel of his was built on

one; all the same, the arrow had gone home, and as Josephine sat turning the pages she was making futile efforts to escape from an ever narrowing circle of accusing memories.

At half-past six she threw down the volume, and going to the window noticed that long shadows had crept softly across the dusty road and up the fronts of the tall block of flats opposite. Presently she would have to dress for a dinner engagement, meanwhile she was thinking of Andrew. Of Andrew who had caught her in the toils of passion for a few short months, then had gone out of her life as completely as if he had never existed. Where was he now? Lying in an unknown grave in France perhaps. Had he been living she would surely have heard of him in the musical circles to which she belonged, for he bid fair in those old days in Vienna to take the world by storm with his playing. She hoped he had not gone under, because he had so loved life, but there was nothing personal in the wish. *That* chapter was closed for good. So she told herself with the more insistence in order to discountenance the mood roused by the reading of Erasmus's novel.

While standing in front of the mirror doing her hair a question suggested itself. Why had Erasmus Langton chosen that particular type of character for dissection?

She was dining to-night at the house of his two maiden aunts, with whom he lived, and might have the chance of asking him. If she had the courage! An alternative she doubted, having personal reasons for wishing to avoid the consequent discussion.

Later in the evening she lounged in a corner of Miss Langton's drawing-room, watching Erasmus as

he sat talking, or rather listening to the inanities of a round-faced girl in blue. Josephine, knowing the girl's capacity for boring all with whom she came into contact, marvelled at his patience. He didn't even appear to be acting—could the girl by any possibility interest him ?

He sat, one leg crossed over the other, balancing on the summit of his right knee a carved wooden bear he had taken from a table close at hand. Now and again he stroked the back of the little beast in caressing fashion, his grey eyes smiling behind his glasses at some thought with which the girl in blue had apparently no connection. Erasmus was thirty and looked much older. Josephine had known him since her girlhood, and could not remember his ever looking young. This was perhaps accounted for by a shyness of disposition, which, being accepted by him with resignation, lent him an air of dignified reserve.

She had been used to his seeking her out for talk, whether they met in his own house or at that of mutual friends ; but to-night he lingered by the girl in blue until Josephine began to think she would have no opportunity of speech with him. Barbara Langton, however, the younger of the maiden aunts, at last intervened, and he being set free walked as a matter of course towards Josephine's corner.

" Why so solitary ? " he asked, seating himself on the couch by her side.

" Isn't it better to be solitary than to have boring company ? " she answered, thinking of the girl in blue.

" Is that a hint for me ? "

She began to laugh. " I'm stupid to-night, and you're tiresome."

" Well, the inference was obvious." Whilst he

spoke he was holding up the little brown bear by one of its hind legs. Then, as if too much preoccupied with the toy to engage in any but desultory conversation he went on, "I saved the life of a spider yesterday. A lovely little spider with a beautiful bulbous body. It was drowning in the gutter in Oxford Street."

Josephine listened absently. She was wondering whether he expected her to mention the book. But his air of detachment from any but trivial matters made this difficult, even had she decided to do so. The question however was settled for her. Turning to readjust the sofa cushion, she caught sight of a volume which had been pushed underneath. Their eyes met as she exclaimed: "Your book!"

"Ah!" he exclaimed, with a stage attitude of expectant interest.

"Do you want me to talk about it?" asked Josephine.

"If you can do so, truthfully."

"Why should you imagine the alternative?" Josephine, as she spoke, met his eyes with an effort.

"Well! you see," he replied slowly, still apparently preoccupied with the wooden toy: "The task might demand more moral courage than you possess."

His companion started, then catching a gleam of amusement in the eyes he for one second turned on her, breathed a sigh of relief.

"Such a remark, coming from the man who wrote that book, is an affectation of modesty," she said.

"Isn't it a sign of worth to be modest?"

She passed this over as puerile and went on, "It's a fine book in its righteous anger, but it's a bit cruel. I couldn't have treated the girl as you did, although

I should have known, perhaps better than yourself, how well she deserved it."

She paused, but he only replied briefly: "Go on. I reserve my defence until I've heard all you have to say."

Josephine now became aware that the moment she dreaded had come. Her courage ebbed, but she pulled herself together and said, with something of defiance in her voice: "You didn't even make for her the excuse that she loved the man."

"But the whole point of the book is that she did *not* love him!"

Josephine experienced a moment of acute mental torture. To herself she said, "He is quite right; she did not love him, and I did not love Andrew." Then returning to the attack, "But she *thought* she did."

"If *you* think that, *I* expressed myself badly."

Josephine was convicted of the guilt of wilful misunderstanding. "You mean," she said tentatively, "that a girl of her sort wouldn't be likely to deceive herself."

"I do. Also," he continued argumentatively, "you must recollect that the man was bad. Such a man doesn't inspire a good love. The quality of a great affection depends as a rule on the worth of the object."

"I don't agree with you," said Josephine, secretly glad to be able conscientiously to differ from him on one point. As she spoke there arose before her a mental vision of a poverty-stricken room where a girl sat stitching from early morning until late at night, resisting the ravages of consumption, living on a great Hope, which thrived and bloomed in an arctic

winter of constant and recurrent disappointment.

"At least, there are exceptions," she added.

"Which go to prove the rule," he supplemented, with a smile.

At this moment Barbara Langton approached, carrying with her a violin case. "We want you to play, Josephine," she said.

"Ah, yes, do," added Erasmus, a note of anticipatory pleasure in his voice.

Josephine, without a word, rose, and opening the case took from it her violin and a piece of music. The latter she handed to Miss Langton. As the two walked towards the piano there was a perceptible pause. Josephine was beginning to make a name in the musical world, and her performances in private were considered somewhat of the nature of a condescension.

It is one of the unwritten laws of good manners that people should not stare at their neighbours during appeals to the emotions, and the listeners were careful to avoid each other's eyes. Erasmus sat huddled up in a peculiarly ungraceful attitude in a corner of the couch. During the opening passage of Josephine's performance he had continued to play absently with the little brown bear. Then he had put it down softly, and hugging his knees with his clasped hands, glared through his glasses into space, with that cold pertinacity of expression which near-sighted grey eyes sometimes assume in moments of self-forgetfulness.

Josephine was not included in the universal taboo, and those who looked at her saw the embodied intensity of a mood which the violin voiced to her touch. Her figure swayed slightly and one noticed

its grace. The black silk dress looked as if it had been worn often enough to become a part of her. But one did not think much of the dress or the wearer while listening to the music she made—*that* touched some chord so personal to each separate hearer that he walked in his own special dreamland while it lasted.

It came to an end all too soon. At the closing notes dreams fled like ghosts before prosaic daylight. The dreamers, in the twinkling of an eye, awoke, and donning their masks of conventionality, murmured their polite tribute of thanks.

Josephine went back to Erasmus and referring to her recent performance, asked, "What do you think of that little French thing?"

"It's awful," he replied.

"Yes, it *is* sad."

"'Sad' isn't the word to apply to the passionate dreariness of the conception."

"Then I've had my revenge. Your book is like that music: it's without hope."

"I see," he replied, with an amused sarcasm, "you pine after a sentimental ending; and the logical result of one's acts—character—is to be converted into a plastic material which can be remoulded from the devilish into the angelic in the last chapter."

"I wanted the girl to have had a chance," said Josephine in a rather unsteady voice.

"Pardon me," he replied quickly, "you seem to take the matter in somewhat personal fashion. Perhaps you know some one . . ."

"Yes, I do."

"I shouldn't draw conclusions or make parallels," he said. "It's a ghastly thing to do. Generalities

are the deuce ; might as well have boots for the whole human race made on one last ! "

" That's right," she remarked, with a visible air of relief, " and now I'm going to ask your aunt to excuse me. I want to get home early to-night."

Having first made her apologies, then collected her music, Josephine emerged into the hall. Here she found Erasmas walking aimlessly up and down with his hands in his pockets, while Miss Langton was apparently engaged in searching for something. " Erasmus has lost his hat," she explained.

" Yes," he continued. " It's very odd, for I distinctly remember hanging it on something ' knobly ' somewhere when I came in this evening."

" Haven't you more than one ? " asked Josephine.

" He's got three," said his aunt, " but not one is forthcoming now, and he must see you home."

" Suppose I tie a handkerchief round my head," he suggested, " or, happy thought, go as I am."

Josephine, who had been secretly wishing to get away without any more fuss, seized the opportunity to remark that she was quite capable of seeing herself into the next street, and with a laughing " good night," was out of the house and some yards on her way before either her hostess or Erasmus had the presence of mind to protest.

CHAPTER II

ALTHOUGH only the latter end of March the night was southern in its warmth; and Josephine, once away from the house, slackened her steps. All too soon she would reach her own door and have to leave the soothing mystery of the deserted streets.

Now that the busy life of day had withdrawn, a "Presence" stole through their empty echoing lengths. Its garments diffused the scent of spring flowers, a will-o'-the-wisp perfume that eluded, yet quickened the senses. It came to Josephine in this moment of reaction from hours of mental and spiritual strain like a benediction. In the quick rebound which characterises such natures, a mood of exaltation took the place of her former depression.

Erasmus was right. It does not do to generalise; and after all, her own case was not that of the girl in the book. She, Josephine, had willed to give up her lover. No sight or sound of him had come to her for seven long years. Probably she would never see him again. Then why worry herself!

During those seven years had she not worked hard, and lived the life that such a man as Erasmus, for instance, would have wished her to live? Her elation continued to rise. The past seemed as if it had never been—the future had beautiful possibilities.

Out here in the wide silent night, full of the scent of spring, which the day's unusual warmth had called into being, she threw off the incubus of brooding care with a sudden accession of light-hearted irresponsibility. It seemed fit accompaniment to the poetry of the hour when some one, somewhere, began to whistle softly an air from " Tristan."

Turning the corner of her own street, she perceived the author of the sounds to be a man advancing in her direction from its other end. Slowly and sweetly, the notes of the " Love Song " were distinctly audible. They were breathed forth with a meditative tenderness, and that exquisite adherence to time and tune which betokens the ear of the trained musician.

To Josephine they came with associations—poignant recollections to which this day of interior conflict seemed fit prefix. Her heart began to beat with a strange excitement, mingled with a feeling of apprehension. It was as if, after years of stagnation in some backwater of life, she had suddenly been thrust forth again into the rush of the tide.

The man came on steadily towards her, his hands in the pockets of his light overcoat, his head bent, his whistle the apparently mechanical accompaniment of mental preoccupation. The street lay full in a broad stare of moonlight, so that Josephine could plainly note the details of his dress and person. As she did so, the feeling of apprehension became an emotion founded on fact. Andrew, whom she had imagined in an unknown grave on the other side of the Channel, was here, within a few yards of her. So near that to have turned to escape his notice might have brought about the very contingency she desired so anxiously to avoid.

She trod lightly, keeping close to the area railings. But a sudden obstacle to progress intervened accompanied by a sound of rending silk. A smothered exclamation of annoyance escaped her, and the man, who was now by her side, stopped whistling and glanced up with alert attention.

Josephine was meanwhile making desperate efforts to disentangle her skirt from the jagged piece of ironwork upon which it had caught. Seeing her predicament he paused and with a polite "Allow me," set her free with one or two deft movements which put her own clumsy attempts to shame.

Having effected her escape he just glanced at her with that absence of personal interest which politeness dictates, and was continuing his way, when he hesitated, turned another look on her, and paused abruptly. "Is it possible! . . . Josephine! . . ."

"Yes," she replied, and waited helplessly for the sequel.

"Well, I'm blest! What an extraordinary coincidence! I was just thinking of you. I'd been reading the account of your successes in *The Musician*!" As he spoke he was making a comprehensive survey of her cloaked figure, his expression meanwhile conveying a half-pleased, half-idle surprise.

To Josephine—whose thoughts had been concerned with the tragic side of their past intimacy—the nature of his greeting, his ready smile and absence of self-consciousness, came with the shock of a sudden descent into a world where such subtleties of conscience as she had been considering seemed superfluous. This meeting which, to herself, was so charged with pain, was apparently to him no more

than the chance pleasant encounter with an old friend.

His attitude made it impossible either to ignore him altogether, or to adopt any tone in expression of her inward trouble. So she took refuge in the only alternative left and, following his lead, replied: "And I was not unprepared for seeing you—I recognised your whistle."

He was looking at her questioningly. "But what are you doing out alone at this time of night?" he asked.

"I've only come from the next street, and have but a few steps farther to go," she replied.

Without a word he took the violin case from her hands, and turned with her in the direction she had indicated.

The little matter-of-course action effaced in one moment the recollection of that seven years' interval, and her thoughts went back to the days when they were fellow students in Vienna—to the help he had given her in her musical studies, the pleasures they had shared together, and the familiarity of their intercourse which had yet left *him* a stranger, no matter how thoroughly he might know *her*. She remembered too the jealousy of some of the other girls who had envied her friendship with the brilliant young violinist of whom such great things had been predicted—things which had not come to pass.

"It's odd I should never have run against you before. I've spent the last two years in London." His voice brought her back to the present.

"D'you think so?" she replied. "It seems to me much more odd that we should have met to-

night." She paused, holding out her hand for the violin case.

But he was apparently oblivious of this hint at farewell, and followed her up the stone staircase to the door of her flat.

Here she paused again. "Good night," she said conclusively.

"Oh! hang it all, Josephine, aren't you going to ask me in?"

"I can't. I'm living here by myself."

He was watching her fit the latchkey into the door. "I don't see the force of the objection," he said calmly.

An uncontrollable feeling of resentment at his air of insouciance overcame her, and turning to him she exclaimed desperately, "Have you forgotten?"

"I imagined you didn't wish me to remember!" His manner was perfectly well bred, but the significance of his words was a merciless probing of the sensitive nerve.

"You're cruel!" The exclamation escaped her involuntarily as she stood at the open door.

"No," he answered smilingly. "Only more logical than yourself. You dropped me on your return to London. I naturally concluded the Vienna episode was a closed chapter."

"Then why wish to reopen that chapter?"

"I don't. I'd rather start fresh." Then with a sudden change of manner he added, "Look here! I'm coming in. I want to talk 'shop.'" As he spoke he followed her across the hall into the little drawing-room.

Josephine walked to the open window and stood there silently, without attempting to remove her

cloak; while he, apparently unheeding her chill reception, was busy with the fastenings of her violin case. He removed the instrument tenderly and, having examined it, drew the bow once or twice softly across the strings. Then he asked abruptly, "How much did you give for it?"

"A hundred pounds. I bought it with a little legacy Aunt Clara left me." She spoke mechanically, continuing to stare into the street.

"It's worth two. If I'm not much mistaken, it's an 'Amati.'"

"It is," she answered without enthusiasm.

"What a stroke of luck!" he exclaimed, with an excitement of manner strongly in contrast with her own inertness. He continued to draw the bow idly backwards and forwards across the strings; then suddenly he placed the violin in position under his chin.

Josephine was standing with her back towards him, but divining his intention, turned with a quick movement. "Don't play," she said, with an imploring gesture.

But apparently he did not hear her. His face was kindling as a medley of wild notes filled the quiet room. It was a tarantelle, a mad dance full of the sound of quick-stepping feet, wild movements and the rushing currents of life.

Josephine turned once more to the window, her listless attitude in nowise affected by the verve of his playing. Now and again he glanced at her, and each time his fingers moved with greater velocity. But she still stood leaning idly against a chair-back, in an attitude expressive of nothing more than a weary indifference.

He broke off in the middle of a bar, and there was silence, during which the echoing footsteps of a solitary passer in the street were distinctly audible. He waited until the sound grew thin in the distance, then once more drew the bow across the strings.

This time it was a slow movement which carried one through an intricate maze of arpeggios, and suggested a mood of expectation. It also ceased in sudden fashion, and a feeling of suspense followed in its wake.

Josephine stirred uneasily and her face paled. He gave another covert glance at her, then the violin began to respond like some live thing to the touch of the master.

How often had she heard him play that air in Vienna! She knew its sweetness, its crescendo and diminuendo of stress on the emotions, its enervating passion and exotic charm. As she listened, thoughts of those old days mingled with the subtle scent of night which came in through the open window, and the mood of unrest and self-torture which had been hers all day was reversed.

She turned her eyes down into the street. A boy stood on the kerb as if spellbound, listening to the sounds which floated through the open window. He had broken off in the midst of a shambling walk, and was gazing upwards with a mingled air of astonishment and awestruck enjoyment, his solitary, motionless figure caught within the circle of enchantment.

The night was very warm, and Josephine mechanically unfastened her cloak and let it slip off her shoulders. There was a muffled sound of traffic in the more busy adjacent streets. It was pleasant to the ears, it meant life and enjoyment; the thrill

of human interests and excitements. Everything was strangely pleasant. She had been awake in a sad world full of questions, now she was asleep in a charmed one where nothing mattered—a realm of fantasy where one was freed from the cruel burden of responsibility.

Out of the shifting medley of suggestions which the music inspired, one picture at length stood out in tender colour. . . . A room in the drear twilight of a misty spring evening—an interlude of nature's depression, when the budding trees, seen through the open window, stood sad and still against a grey sky. An odd interval of silence—born of a sympathetic mood with the brooding hour. . , . A sense of loneliness which presently found itself expressed in plaintive melody. . . . A period of drifting. . . .

Josephine at this moment roused herself with a supreme effort of will, her sudden movement overturning a small table on which was an afternoon tea-set. The crash of the fall broke the emotional spell with a jarring discord, and Andrew threw down the bow with an exclamation of annoyance.

She stooped to pick up the pieces of broken china, and, with a quick recovery from his momentary irritation, he helped her with the task.

They accomplished the work together in silence, then Josephine stood up facing him. "Andrew," she said solemnly, "you must never come here again."

"Well, of all the rude, inhospitable old things——"

She ignored the remark, gazing miserably before her with lips quivering in childish fashion. "Oh! if I had never met you!" she said.

The passion of regret in her voice apparently stirred

him not one whit as he answered, "And that's gratitude for all I did for you! When you came to Vienna you were a raw schoolgirl with no more knowledge of your powers than a cat has of the theory of evolution. When you left you were an artist."

"Yes—and a woman with a sordid secret."

His eyes dropped as she looked at him with a question in her own. The puzzle of his personality was troubling her as it had often done before. Where was the real man? "I don't understand you," she said hopelessly. "I never did."

"Look here," he continued coaxingly, "don't worry about the past, and don't misjudge me. We'll be friends, shall we? Friends pure and simple—nothing else. I won't come here again if you had rather I didn't. We can meet out. Do you remember those Saturday afternoons in Vienna? We were good company for each other."

He talked rapidly, with an undercurrent of shamed self-consciousness, which appealed to her because of its tacit admission of that which he had heretofore ignored.

"Can't you see that it will be best for us not to meet?" she asked.

"No, I can't. I never could see the force of ignoring unsolicited gifts. We didn't seek each other; Fate arranged the meeting for us."

She stood unresponsive and he turned away, busying himself with replacing the violin in its case.

Finding her still silent, he picked up his hat and stood irresolutely before her. "You have changed; the old Josephine would have forgiven me and we should have been good friends again," he told her.

There was in the tone of his voice such an odd

note of appeal, and so complete an absence of any disturbing quality, that she was involuntarily touched. "If only," she said hesitatingly, "I could trust you, and that it would be nothing more——"

"Try me, Josephine," he interrupted gaily. "Don't stand on your dignity, it's such awfully dull work. You know perfectly well you *are* lonely and would like to say 'yes.' As for myself, I've been horribly bored lately."

She interrupted him, incredulous. "*You* bored! Then you must indeed have altered."

He saw the advantage in her change of tone and was quick to follow it up. "Yes," he said, with just a suspicion of pose, "I've been down on my luck since my return to London."

She detected the pose, but also discerned an underlying note of depression. "Have you lost money?" she asked.

"Lost money—no! just the other way about."

She looked at him questioningly and he went on. "Yes, if I choose I can live to play now, seeing there's no need to play to live."

"What an ideal existence!"

"Think so? Wait till you try it!"

"I shall never have the chance, and, anyhow, it wouldn't be the same. *I* have only talent, *you* have genius."

"I used to think so myself, in the old student days," he admitted, "but the war knocked the bottom out of that idea."

"It must have been *awful*, for *you*."

"'Awful!' I never was healthier in my life than when in the trenches. I'm the sort of chap that deteriorates under blue skies. But the music of the

guns silenced my fiddle-scraping for the time being, and the money I came into on my return to England finished the business. This is the first time, for a year or more, that I've had a bow in my hands."

"If *that's* the case I'm glad we met."

An odd smile supplanted his expression of moodiness. "Beginning to think it *wasn't* the devil who arranged the meeting?" he asked slyly.

She ignored the question and went on, "Something was bound to happen sooner or later to give you a fresh start. *Your* light can't be hid under a bushel."

"Better be careful what you say," he warned her. "You're saddling yourself with a responsibility."

They stood looking at each other tentatively. "I don't mind," she said at last.

"Then it's a bargain?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

He held out his hand. "Good night, Josephine, but not 'good-bye,'" and he was gone with the suddenness that characterised his leave-takings of old.

CHAPTER III

THE next day was a busy one. There were pupils calling to receive lessons, and arrears of Josephine's own violin practice to make up. She worked with her usual concentration, but beneath her outward calm and collectedness a strange excitement reigned.

There had come to her a re-awakening of forces which had been lying dormant for seven years, and she found herself thinking of those years of hard work and absence of inward strife with something bordering on contempt. The mental pain which the reading of Erasmus's book had caused her now seemed a luxury of emotion in one who, far removed from the battle, sat in judgment on its tactics.

She knew this was wrong, and in strange contradiction of mind was deeply ashamed of the change in herself which Andrew's arrival had brought about. Recollections of the similar conflict of feelings which had raged during her previous intimacy with him now crowded upon her, and she felt with despair that the results of those five intervening years of hard work and moral effort had been wiped out in one hour.

Last night she had courted reflection, to-day she avoided it. This was comparatively easy until the door shut on the last pupil; then she thought with

dismay of the two hours which must elapse before she need begin to dress for her evening engagement. A walk with an object at the end of it would help to pass the time, and there was some one to whom a visit from herself would be welcome.

In the neighbourhood of Belgravia there is a noisy road where, amidst business premises, public-houses and a constant stream of traffic from two adjacent thoroughfares, stand a row of small houses with an odd and pleasing illusion of country sights and sounds. This evening the converging arms of the street seemed to have taken into their embrace all the warmth of the evening sky. The little houses were bathed in colour, their bright windows became pools of ruby light, and their red-tiled roofs burned with a glow responsive to the deepening red above.

Josephine stopped at the brightest of these cheerful-looking abodes. It had been freshly painted in white and green, and spring flowers were blooming in the front garden. On a large board placed over one of the windows was painted in gold letters, "H. Dobbs, Chimney Sweep."

The front door, which opened on to a dark flagged passage, was standing ajar. Josephine pushed it back, and, entering, made her way towards a steep, narrow staircase at the end. As she mounted it there came the sound of a woman's plaintive voice singing a coon song.

The visitor stood for a moment listening, then gave a quiet tap on the door. The song ceased and some one called out, "Come in."

The room which Josephine entered was full of a shimmer of white silk and pink sunset, and she

picked her way through billows of the former towards a girl seated before a sewing-machine. The machine stood idle, and the girl had in her arms a small, fair-haired child, over whom she was bending with an air of preoccupied and awkward tenderness which was strangely pathetic.

Josephine often wondered, whilst watching the mother and child, whether the instinct of motherhood was wholly absent or only undeveloped. The latter supposition was a natural one, seeing that Mignon the elder had been barely eighteen years of age when Mignon the younger was born.

Josephine had learnt this, with the rest of the sad story, many months ago. She had made the acquaintance of the pair in an omnibus one sultry July day. Mignon the elder had been seized with a fainting fit, and in attempting to get out of the 'bus had fallen with the child in her arms. Josephine had gone to the rescue, and had taken them to her rooms where she had given them tea and afterwards seen them safely home.

The intimacy thus commenced had continued. Josephine was no philanthropist, and if engaged on any definite charitable work would certainly have been haunted by a dread of "posing." But these two babes, fighting against such fearful odds in their struggle for existence, appealed to her deepest sympathies, and a week rarely passed without her putting in an appearance at the house of H. Dobbs, Chimney Sweep, where Mignon rented a room.

This evening, as she entered, little Mignon's mother looked up with an air of relief. "Oh, Miss Delmar, I'm so worried!" she exclaimed. "Baby

isn't well; she wants nursing and I've promised to get this dressing-gown finished to-night." She nodded her head in the direction of the shimmering billows of white silk as she spoke, and turned on Josephine weary eyes of deep, wonderful blue.

Her visitor without answering lifted the child from the other's arms, and seating herself in a rocking chair began to sway slowly backwards and forwards.

The dressmaker, without a moment's pause, caught up the mass of cobwebby silk and began to work at it with feverish hurry. "It's part of an Indian outfit," she explained, "and I dare not be behind time with it."

As Josephine watched the busy fingers sewing on hooks and eyes with a rapidity born of constant practice, her thoughts employed themselves with a certain problem that invariably presented itself when she was in Mignon's company. In spite of the childish candour which Mignon always displayed, there was one subject on which she had been consistently reticent. Josephine had never heard the other express shame or regret for her fall. A passion tragic in its tenacity for the man who had caused it, and a blind belief in his goodness she had often displayed; but any hint of sorrow for his or her own wrongdoing had been strangely absent.

Josephine thinking of this made a mental comparison, then hesitated on the brink of a question. "Do you know, Mignon, I've often wondered . . ." she began.

The other, with a ready apprehension of something embarrassed in her companion's tone, looked

up from her work with a gesture of affection. "If it's something I can tell you there's no need to go on 'wondering,'" she said with a smile. As she spoke she made one or two ineffectual attempts to thread her needle, then moved to the window to catch the fast-fading light. "Perhaps," she continued, "I *know* what you 'wonder.'"

She threaded her needle, and turned towards her companion. "Miss Delmar," she began: "is it not a good thing to have loved?"

"Yes, I suppose so, but——Oh, Mignon, I can't say any more. You know what I mean."

"Yes, I know," answered the other, "but I cannot understand. If I did, all the joy in my life would be gone. The thought that he loved me, and that I once belonged to him, makes me proud and glad to be myself. It has been a safeguard through more temptations than *you* could ever imagine. What does it matter that people call it 'sin'? To me it is all that is opposite to such a thing."

Josephine was dumb before the simplicity of this great passion, and the arguments she might reasonably have used were left in the region of unspoken thoughts. She dared not put into words her natural supposition as to the unworthiness of Mignon's lover, but she longed to know how Mignon reconciled this trust in him with his cruel desertion.

Josephine was saved the awkwardness of replying to her companion's impassioned declaration by the latter's preoccupation with the lamp she was at that moment lighting. Mignon had no time to play the rôle which her circumstances would seem to demand, and save for the involuntary shaking of her fingers as she carefully trimmed the wick, betrayed no sign

of the stress of emotion under which she was labouring. She had never looked at herself from the outside, and had lived her tragedy without having realised herself as an object for pity, interest, or condemnation. This absence of self-consciousness resulted in a dignity of character which to Josephine was almost fearsome in its simple truth.

She looked at the girl's shrunken figure, which the loose folds of her cotton blouse failed to hide, at the weary, trembling fingers which were bungling over their task, at the pallid face, expressing nothing just now but anxious preoccupation with the sewing on of hooks, and Josephine could no longer keep back an expression of passionate indignation.

"Mignon," she said, leaning towards the other, "how could he be so cruel as to leave you?"

Mignon's blue eyes for one second flashed indignation on her questioner, then she replied doggedly: "Whatever he was, he wasn't cruel . . . I don't know why he left me . . . It must have been that his leave was stopped, and he was ordered back to France at a moment's notice. It was when I was at Jones's, the florists, you know. He came in one day to buy some flowers and just as he was going he whispered in my ear, 'To-morrow evening outside Friscati's,' and I said, 'Yes.' I went at the usual time but he never came, and I have never seen him since. I used to go every evening and wait and wait, and I used to cry to think how sorry he would be for me if he could see me standing there in the bitter cold, but he never came."

The speaker picked up the last hook and sewed it on in silence, then she held the dressing-gown at

arm's length, giving it gentle shakes which caused the silken folds to fall into their places with a swirl of soft rustles.

Josephine displayed a sudden interest in the garment, and for a moment the two girls were one in their feminine delight in its beauty.

"Have you finished now?" asked Josephine.

"Very nearly," and a weary sigh accompanied the words.

As the girl spoke there came from below the thin notes of an old piano. Some one was playing the "Dead March in Saul." The incongruity of the solemn air with the jangling notes of the crazy old instrument, and with the precise, expressionless touch of the player was at once ludicrous and oddly pathetic. Josephine and Mignon exchanged glances of amused comprehension. Then Josephine asked: "Has Miss Vincenza been having another quarrel with Mrs. Dobbs?"

Mignon laughed with the first touch of girlish fun she had displayed that evening. "I expect so," she replied. "She never plays the 'Dead March' on any other occasion, except when a member of the Royal family dies."

Miss Vincenza had put down the loud pedal now, and was attempting a conscientious representation of the drums. The absurd and pathetic parody of that which it aimed at interpreting seemed to Josephine to bear a certain relationship to the shadowy existence of the player, and she said, half to herself, "Poor Miss Vincenza!"

There was another thoughtful pause, then Josephine reverting to the original subject of conversation began: "Mignon, didn't you ever, during those

terrible months of waiting, try to find out his whereabouts? You could have made inquiries at the War Office."

"To spy on him—*no*! I knew he would come to me if he could, and, besides, how was I to find out when I didn't know his name."

"Oh Mignon!" The exclamation was eloquent and a dogged look came into the listener's face.

"I always called him by his Christian name, and never asked for any other," she said.

"Didn't it ever occur to you . . . ?"

"No—not that—not that," declared Mignon vehemently. "It was just that he *forgot*. He was like that—then he left in a hurry, and——"

"You imagined perhaps that he was dead?"

"No," answered Mignon thoughtfully, "I don't think I ever did *really*. Only when other people said unkind things about him and I couldn't find an answer to them. No," she continued, with conviction, "I don't think he is dead. He's alive and some day he will come back to me. It's that hope which gives me the strength to work on."

"Mignon, why will you not let me help you? I can see you are not fit for the struggle, and I've earned more money lately than I want."

"Then save it! You may need it some day."

Mignon made this remark with that air of shrewd wisdom which characterises one who has learnt the value of money through the lack of it.

"But just think of the pleasure, the relief of mind, it would be to myself, and the help to yourself, if I

might send you the money I shall earn in ten minutes this evening," pleaded Josephine.

Mignon shook her head obstinately, "Some day perhaps," she added, "when I want it more," and her glance went towards the sleeping child.

CHAPTER IV

AS Josephine was making her way past Miss Vincenza's door, it opened, and the old lady greeted her with a ceremonious bow.

"Good evening, Miss Delmar," she said. "What did you think of my lugubrious performance?"

Miss Vincenza's speech was characterised by the same precision as her playing, and her accent was unmistakably that of a lady. Her hair was white, and worn short in masculine fashion, her dress was an odd assortment of antiquated finery, and on her gnarled old hands there flashed several magnificent diamond rings.

Josephine smiled. "It *was* rather too bad of you!" she said.

Miss Vincenza invited the other to enter, then sinking her voice to a portentous whisper said "I've been grossly insulted by that 'thing' in petticoats." Having made this communication she paused, rather it seemed to collect her ideas than in expectation of any response from her visitor.

Josephine however said gravely, "I'm very sorry"; and waited with what patience she could muster for the sequel.

"Yes," repeated Miss Vincenza, "grossly insulted, and by a 'crawler' too! Do you know what I mean by a 'crawler'?" she asked in a raised voice with a sudden brisk animation.

Josephine expressed her ignorance on this point and Miss Vincenza continued: "Why a chapel-goer of course!" She imparted the information condescendingly as one explains an obvious fact to a child.

"Oh!" replied Josephine ambiguously.

"Yes, in my experience it's always a chapel-goer if it's anything unpleasant."

"You haven't told me the trouble yet," said Josephine, resigning herself to the inevitable part of listener to Miss Vincenza's woes.

"That's very soon done. Mrs. Dobbs is the offender. She has abused a sacred trust I reposed in her. I went away for a few days, leaving Thomas in her charge. On the third night of my absence I awoke thinking I heard him crying for me. I packed up and came straight back the next morning. What do you think I found him doing on my return?"

"I'm sure I can't imagine."

"I don't suppose you can! Would it occur to any moral or reasonable human being to give horse flesh to a cat who had been brought up on porridge and milk!"

"But don't cats like it?"

"Of course they like it, as human beings like what is wrong. It is a sinful inclination, and Thomas will never be the same again; his morals are ruined. He used to be such a restful cat, and now he does nothing but run backwards and forwards to the front door in anticipation of the cats' meat man."

While Miss Vincenza was speaking her eyes travelled towards a table on which was a large sheet of paper and pens and ink. "I am making a fresh will," she explained. "I have destroyed the old

one in which Mrs. Dobbs figured. I had left her one of my rings. I shall now leave it to that poor child upstairs."

"I fear she will not be here very long herself," said Josephine sadly.

"I fear not," replied Miss Vincenza, concisely: "and what is to become of the baby I want to know? Why doesn't its father come forward and help?"

"Probably he isn't aware there is one. Mignon herself has no idea of his whereabouts."

Miss Vincenza leaned forward and in a mysterious whisper said, "He is in London, now, I believe."

Josephine started. "Then you know more than I do," she said. "Mignon has never even told me his name."

"Neither has she told me. The poor child has probably been bound down to secrecy, but three years ago I met her walking with him one evening in Regent Street and I never forget a face. I noticed him particularly, he has a distinguished appearance—"

"Were you acquainted with Mignon before she came to live here?" asked Josephine in surprise.

"I knew her when she worked at the florists. But I was going to say when you interrupted me just now, that last Sunday morning I saw this same man on Westminster Bridge."

"You didn't tell her?"

"What was the use! He disappeared in the crowd again and may be miles away now for aught we know to the contrary." Miss Vincenza, for the moment, had lost her stilted manner and spoke with something of the brusqueness which her masculine appearance suggested.

Josephine sighed. "You were right not to tell her," she said. "I, too, shan't mention it."

Miss Vincenza nodded her head in preoccupied fashion, then with a reversion to her more artificial manner said: "There is a question I want to ask you with respect to this will I am making, Miss Delmar. In the event of my changing my name, do you think it would still hold good?"

"I don't understand," said Josephine hesitatingly.

"Well, to put it quite plainly, if I should marry?"

Josephine looking at the strange old woman in her antiquated finery, at the halting, feeble movements with which she walked towards the table, and at the enlarged knuckles of her shapeless hands was moved to an immense pity. "I really don't know," she faltered.

"Ah, well! I must ask some one else," said Miss Vincenza cheerfully. "True, I have nothing much but my rings to leave, but I should like those to go where they will be properly appreciated. They were the gift of my godmother, Lady Temple; and poor as I am they have never once been in pawn—neither they nor a magnificent Honiton lace dress which belonged to my mother, and which I have always thought would make such a suitable wedding gown." And Miss Vincenza smiled self-consciously.

Josephine began to feel a longing to get away. There was a suggestion of madness in this weird survival of youthful hopes in a body distorted by age. The small, close room crowded with old-fashioned furniture, which was beginning to loom indistinct in the grey twilight, and the horror of a great loneliness of which the object seemed so strangely unconscious; all this induced in Josephine a mood of

nameless melancholy, and it was only by exercising a considerable effort of will that she was able to refrain from making a precipitate departure. It was to her credit that she stayed and listened to her companion's excursions into a past, where, while lovers abounded, none were equal to overcoming the varied and mysterious obstacles to a union with Miss Vincenza—stayed until she remembered there was barely time to get home and dress for her evening's engagement.

At last, after having bade the old lady a hasty adieu, she was once more outside in the busy street. Here she took a deep breath of relief, and walked fast in an effort to throw off her depression. Her mood was no unusual one, she having in her organism a strain of melancholy which often caused her to fly to some form of excitement for relief. On this occasion she tried to fix her thoughts on the concert at Queen's Hall in which she was to take part this evening. But although she had been looking forward to it for weeks past, now that it was within an hour or two of accomplishment a sudden indifference seized her.

As she listlessly ascended the staircase leading to her flat she was met by some one coming down. Her heart began to beat, and the black gloom which had enveloped her, lifted. It was Andrew!

He took her hand with a quick smile, and there was about him a spontaneous gaiety of manner which somehow put to shame her own brooding thought. It was this apparent freedom in him from the incubus of fear or care which had always been such a potent attraction to Josephine. At this moment, as so often in the past, she experienced

on seeing him a glad reaction of mood which coloured her greeting accordingly. True he had broken his promise in calling again, but she had not the energy to argue the point with him, and so she returned his smile with one as spontaneous as his own, and waited the explanation of his call.

"I saw in the papers that you are playing at Queen's Hall this evening," he began.

"Yes," she replied, "and I'm just hurrying home to dress."

"Have you dined?"

"No, I haven't."

"How long will it take you to dress?"

"I might manage it in twenty minutes."

"Very well then. I'll come back in twenty minutes with a taxi. You can dine somewhere with me, and we will go on to the Hall together. I want to hear you play."

He made the announcement with smiling assurance, then hurried off again in order to frustrate any intention of refusal on her part.

She went straight to her room and found that Martha, her solitary factotum, had laid out on the bed the new dress of ivory ninon which had been prepared for this evening's wear. Josephine looked at it doubtfully. Andrew had always liked her in white. To wear it would be to pay him a delicate compliment and thus further encourage his too ready advances to a renewal of intimacy. Should she do violence to her feminine instincts, and penance for her weakness by wearing the old black silk?

She fetched the latter out of her wardrobe and in doing so noticed the torn hem. This relieved her of the pain of decision, and throwing her last scruple

to the winds, she commenced an expeditious toilet. She was ready and awaiting his arrival in the drawing-room when the expected ring came, a very different creature from the pale-faced woman in black silk of the evening before. Her face was alight with excitement, and the ivory ninon threw into strong relief the darkness of her hair and eyes.

"You look charming," he declared. "Do you remember the concert at the Conservatoire when you made your first appearance? You wore white, then, and ruined your appearance by the addition of a large blue bow."

Josephine laughed. "Yes, I remember," she said. "How rude you were!"

"Well, you see, that blue bow might have turned up on another occasion if I hadn't been firm."

"It very nearly did, but my eyes were opened to the fact that it was unbecoming, and vanity was stronger than self-will."

The stream of reminiscence continued to flow merrily as the cab rolled smoothly down the very road which she had traversed so wearily half an hour before. Her depression had completely fled, and her past scruples seemed absurdly gratuitous. Andrew's manner was entirely reassuring, and she began to feel an elation of spirit at the prospect of a continuance of his companionship.

Seated opposite him at one of the small tables in a West End restaurant where he had taken her to dine, she was struck afresh with the individuality of his bearing, his "distinguished appearance." The words came glibly as if from the outside. Some one had surely used them within her hearing lately? Of course, it was Miss Vincenza in connection with

Mignon's lover. Miss Vincenza! Josephine shuddered at the recollection of the lonely old woman with her mad dreams, and her uncanny cheerfulness. Her image roused a momentary return of depression. After all, she asked herself, was she so much better off than the poor, half-mad old woman? Her relationship with Andrew. What was it? A thing devoid of dignity or worth. A miserable parody of the most supreme joy which is given to human creatures.

She sighed, and he, noticing it, said: "I say, you aren't beginning to feel nervous, are you? Have some champagne?"

"Nervous! what about?"

"Well, you are cool, about playing, of course. That air of Bach's lends itself easily to clumsy treatment."

Josephine laughed. "You forget," she said, "that I'm an old hand now. Thank you for the hint all the same."

"Oh well, I'm glad to hear you don't suffer from stage fright. I know it by experience; and my feelings while awaiting your appearance would amount to positive torture if I thought you were funking."

"That reminds me to ask you a question, if I may?"

"A hundred if you like; but I'm not going to promise to answer all of them."

"I will content myself with one. Why," she began hesitatingly, "have you given up playing in public now? I presume you have, I never hear your name."

A sudden gloom overspread his features. "It's

that confounded money my father left me," he explained. "It's ruined my artistic career. There are some natures that can't work without a goad. I'm one of them. Poverty might have given me some kicks towards a well-earned fame. Riches are paving the way to a certain unmentionable place."

As he spoke Josephine again noticed the unusual expression of forlorn appeal in his face. Their positions towards each other were in a state of transition, it seemed, and the call to responsibility was not altogether welcome. She would have been content that this new phase of intimacy should remain in the region of irresponsible things—just a pleasant trifling, an emotion which dealt with fancies rather than facts—a thing for summer days and holiday hours.

All the same, she wanted to help him, and thinking that a little wholesome fault-finding might be beneficial she said: "That's a cowardly way of talking, Andrew. It's only fools who allow themselves to be the butt of circumstance. You'll have to pull yourself together and make a fresh start."

"I wish to God I could."

"What's to prevent you?"

"Only the worst of all enemies, myself."

She turned on him a thoughtful look. "How old are you, Andrew?" she asked.

"Thirty-one, Josephine."

"That's early to have done with ambition."

"Oh, but I'm fifty in spirit," he maintained lugubriously.

Then she began to laugh. "I can't take you seriously," she said, "because you're so absurdly sorry for yourself."

"I didn't ask for your sympathy," he reminded her stiffly. "I shouldn't have mentioned the subject if you hadn't cross-questioned me."

"Well, it *is* ridiculous to talk of feeling like fifty when you're behaving like five," she persisted as she picked up her gloves.

* * * * *

Josephine's rendering of Bach's air on the G string brought her an enthusiastic encore. She was herself conscious of having played her best. Andrew's critical presence in the front row of the stalls was an incentive to effort, as it had always been in the old student days. In the region of art his supremacy remained untouched: for Josephine knew that while talent had been vouchsafed to herself, on him had been bestowed the awful gift of genius. Thinking so she became hopeful of his future. Surely genius would not consent to be shackled with golden fetters!

Something of this she told him as they sat together in the taxi on their way home, but his lack of response nipped in the bud her well-meant efforts to rouse him. Any enthusiasm he now possessed appeared to be centred in herself.

"By Jove, kiddie!" he said excitedly, "you have made headway. There isn't much I could teach you now."

"Only that which cannot be taught," she said, looking at him with a smile. "Do you remember how you used to rage at me whenever I attempted to interpret 'Beethoven's Concerto in E flat.' I can't do it even now."

"Nonsense, you could do it easily enough if you tried!"

"I repeat that I couldn't."

"Ah well! I'll not argue the point with you now," he said lazily. "Next time I call you can give me a demonstration."

After this they drove on in silence for a while. Then he began teasingly: "Are you meditating how you can best frame an inhospitable negative to my proposal."

Josephine started, recalled by his remark from a land of dreams in which she had been wandering. "No," she said simply. "If you care to come I think I shall be glad."

"You have arrived at the conclusion that I am no longer an object of fear!" There was a note of sarcasm in this remark which seemed to have its root in some secret irritation.

"Do you wish me to pay you so ambiguous a compliment?" she asked, answering his unspoken thought rather than his words.

He stared at her for a moment in silent surprise; then he said impulsively: "No, I'm hanged if I do, Josephine."

She smiled, and leaning forward, put her hand lightly on his. And when his fingers closed round her own she made no effort to withdraw them.

CHAPTER V

THE train was at the point of starting, and Josephine, who had secured a seat in it while Andrew was making purchases at the bookstall, was nearly carried away without him. He jumped in at the last minute, throwing on to the seat an armful of papers and one solid-looking volume.

It was a glorious morning in July. Far up, overhead, were fragments of indistinct white clouds, like torn gossamer against a sky of blue, motionless as painted clouds against a painted sky. Andrew had turned up that morning, after a fortnight's absence, with the suggestion that they should spend the day out of London, and the lure of the sea was speeding them to the south coast, as fast as the express could carry them.

Josephine ignored the papers and magazines. It was more pleasant to look through the open window and, as they left behind, first houses, then green fields, and began to plough their way between steep chalk cuttings, she waited for the first glimpse of the huge shoulders of the downs against the sky. The moment when the train emerged from the chalk cuttings, and across the lonely green distances shadows of clouds were blown like smoke, was one which never disappointed her of its thrill.

Arriving at the place for which Andrew had taken tickets they changed, and after a journey along a branch line were landed at their destination. Their way lay along the cliffs, on one side of them the blue immensity of sky and sea, on the other a green immensity of rolling downs like an ocean petrified. Now and again they rested for a moment or two, then on once more until the path led downwards towards a group of cottages under the shadow of the cliffs.

Here they came upon a small expanse of beach; a few fishermen's nets put out to dry, an old boat in which some children were at play, roses in the front gardens of the cottages, roses on their walls, roses straying over the thatched roofs—roses everywhere—and pigs! each cottager apparently considering a pig or some pigs an inevitable adjunct to his establishment.

She seated herself on a breakwater, tired with her three mile walk, and he threw himself down on the pebbles at her side, both gazing out to sea, their enthusiasm somewhat tempered by the dreamy languor consequent on physical exercise.

Of the bundle of magazines, papers, etc., he had bought at Victoria, only two remained, the others having been deposited at intervals along their route. He had declared them not worth carrying and had left them, carefully weighted with stones, at various stages of their journey along the cliffs, remarking that the papers would be a guide on the return journey should they lose their way in a sea mist.

Of the two articles of literature remaining, one was *The Tatler*, and the other a substantial-looking book

in a loose paper cover. Andrew removed the latter and disclosed to view a well-known green cloth binding. "I thought you might be interested in this," he said, passing the book to her. "I believe it's by the Langton *you* know."

"It is," she answered, "and I've read it."

"Oh, you have! Then I'll look at it myself. You can take *The Tatler*."

Josephine received the magazine from his hands, but made no attempt to open it. Books had no charm for her to-day, also the sight of that green volume had set her thinking. And so she gazed out across the limitless ocean which glittered and shimmered like a liquid jewel, and her thoughts went back to that day four months ago when she had read Erasmus's book and had renewed her intimacy with Andrew.

The situation between herself and the latter was an odd one, not without its pitfalls and a certain insecurity which added to it an element of excitement. Friendship it ostensibly was, without a hint of anything further. Andrew had kept his word, accepting with surprising docility the part she had unconsciously allotted to him. The unexpectedness of this same docility suggested to her that he also had altered during their seven years' separation. Sometimes it seemed to her that his invulnerability had been pierced. He had lost a great deal of his old assurance of manner, and often displayed a strange dependence on her favour, which, while it increased her feeling of friendship for him, decreased her fear of anything less worthy. That there were grounds for such a fear she occasionally felt in some moment of pleasant companionship, and those moments were

the psychological turning points in their intimacy. Josephine took up the burden of responsibility Andrew unconsciously thrust upon her, and, in her new friendship for him, tactfully hid the fact that she was the stronger of the two. Sometimes she speculated about the reason of the change she discovered in him—a change both for the worse and the better. He had always been oddly reticent, and that reticence now appeared a fitting accompaniment to the recurrent fits of gloom to which he was subject. She wondered whether they owed their origin to any period of wrongdoing which might have taken place during the long break in their friendship. Certainly there was no recollection of such moods in her previous knowledge of him.

Her gaze left the glittering waters and went to his recumbent form at her side. He had been turning over the leaves of the book impatiently, as if in no mood for the concentration of thought they demanded, but suddenly his attention became arrested and he settled himself to the perusal of some apparently interesting passage.

The monotonous music of the sea went on. The rattle of the pebbles as the returning wash of water dragged them back to be engulfed in the oncoming wave, the hiss of each breaking crest, and the murmur of its spreading waters. There were voices of children at play in the old boat, and the long drawn-out qu-a-ak! qu-a-ak! of some ducks in one of the cottagers' gardens.

She leaned her head back against the breakwater, closed her eyes, and slept. She was wakened an hour later by Andrew's "Now then, Josephine, wake up and have some tea!" He was standing in front of

her, his hands in his pockets, the green volume under his arm.

She scrambled to her feet with a confused sense of the undignified appearance she must have presented. "I believe I nearly fell asleep," she said. As she spoke she noticed an indefinable change in her surroundings. The sea was no longer pure blue, but a more subtle tone of blue-grey in sympathy with a similar loss of colour in the sky above, and, although the sun was not now visible, the atmosphere had gained in warmth to the extent of closeness.

He noticed her glance round and said, "You have been asleep just an hour. I've read two chapters of your friend's book, and reconnoitred the village for something to eat."

Josephine was suddenly wide awake. "Then you *did* say something about tea." She put her hat straight and, taking his hand, stumbled with cramped limbs over the pebbly beach.

"I can't offer you anything better than new-laid eggs, strawberries and tea," he said gloomily.

"How delightful! What more should one want?"

"You forget we've had no lunch and shan't get any dinner until ten o'clock to-night."

"Cheer up! I don't suppose they will limit the number of eggs."

"Good heavens, Josephine, do you think I have the digestion of an ostrich? But I didn't reckon on getting any sympathy from you after I had mentioned the tea and strawberries."

He was unceremoniously making his way into one of the cottages as he spoke, and, opening a door at

the end of a narrow passage, ushered her into a room where tea was laid for two—a huge metal teapot, thick cups and saucers of brown and yellow delft and pewter spoons. On a dish in the centre of the table was a heaped-up pile of strawberries, and by the side of it a jug of cream.

"There are two eggs each," he observed.

"You can have one of mine if you like," said Josephine, with ostentatious generosity. She had seated herself at the table, and, having poured out tea, was delicately chipping a circle round the top of her first egg.

He looked at her suspiciously. "You're very self-sacrificing. I believe they are hard!"

"As brickbats!" she continued, slicing off the top of the one which had been engaging her attention. Then looking up and meeting his glance, she exclaimed, "Oh, Andrew, I *am* enjoying myself! Isn't it all lovely!"

The grey-blue sea, viewed through the open window, was a picture framed in pink roses. The scent and sight of two bowls of deep red carnations made one oblivious to the metal teapot and thick cups and saucers; and hard-boiled eggs, after all, really weren't bad when one was hungry. So he concluded at the close of the meal when he rather shamefacedly accepted the repeated offer of Josephine's second one, and piled her plate with strawberries by way of compensation.

His hunger being at last appeased, they walked down to the breakwater once more. The tide was going out and a line of yellow sand was beginning to be observable where the pebbly beach ceased. Beyond the nearer grey-blue waters was a belt of

purest turquoise blue, and above it a rift in the pale blue sky, disclosing a glimpse into a far-off country of serene light.

"We have just an hour left before we start on our return journey," he said, taking out his watch.

"Only an hour!" she exclaimed. "I'm so sorry."

He looked at her curiously. "Have you had a pleasant day?" he asked.

"It's been perfect," she said, and inconsequently sighed.

"And you don't regret taking me back—as a friend?"

"No—I am glad."

"What do you think of this?" he asked, indicating Erasmus's book, which he held in his hand.

"I think it is too truthful to be cheerful reading."

"It's hard on the girl," he said, "and it was all the man's fault."

"You are the first person who has taken that view of the case."

"But it was, you know."

"Who can tell?" she said thoughtfully, and as she spoke she reflected on the egoism which he and she alike had displayed in making a personal application.

He made no attempt to continue the conversation, and they sat together in silence watching the mystic response of the changing sea to the changing sky as sunset time approached.

* * * * *

"What in Heaven's name are you going to do with that hideous parcel?" Andrew asked an hour later, as Josephine emerged from the cottage where they had had tea, carrying an ungainly-looking bundle, to which was tied a large bunch of deep red carnations.

"Carry it home, of course. I've bought some strawberries and eggs for a friend who is an invalid."

"But we have three miles to walk to the station, and I object to carrying that ghastly-looking burden all the way."

"I don't want you to help," she replied, with an air of lofty superiority.

He grinned. "You had better reserve your independent speeches for the last stages of the journey."

"We'll take it in turns, and relieve one another at the literary milestones you planted on the way," she suggested.

"You surely don't expect to find them still there!"

"Why not? we didn't meet a solitary creature as we came along."

The breeze had dropped, and even here on the cliffs, between those two limitless oceans of space, it was very warm. A silvery light was spreading almost imperceptibly over sea and sky from westward, and on the horizon a faint line of luminosity divided the grey waters from the grey heavens.

They trudged along, saying little as was their wont, when in harmony with their surroundings; but presently their gaze was simultaneously arrested by a white object on the path ahead.

"It's *Tit Bits*," said Josephine; "that was the last one you left behind."

"I expect they didn't think it worth taking," he said. "You wait until we come to the *Illustrated London News*!"

"I don't believe they would want that either, it's such a clumsy thing to carry. Oh! I forgot," she continued, taking from him the parcel he was holding out to her, and once more they resumed their walk.

Josephine reflected that it really was very hot and the parcel was heavier than she had imagined, but she kept her views to herself, only saying at length, "I believe the *Illustrated London News* has gone—perhaps it blew away. D'you remember what the next one was?"

"Yes, it was *Health*."

"Oh!" she observed gloomily, "no one would take *that*. I can't think whatever made you buy it."

"My digestion isn't what it used to be, and I've been reading up the subject. I can assure you it is a most interesting one to the majority of people. If *Health* hasn't disappeared I shall be much surprised."

Josephine looked anxiously ahead, but there was no cheerful flutter of white paper to be seen. She was quite sure that *Health* had been deposited somewhere near. But Andrew evidently intended they should stick to their bargain, and showed no disposition to relieve her of her load. It seemed heavier at each step, and at last she was forced to put it down in the middle of the road to rest her aching arms.

He glanced at her sympathetically. "It's those eggs," he said. "I believe they are weighted with lead."

"It isn't the parcel, only," she observed, too dejected to laugh at his joke; "there's a horrid little spiky nail in my shoe which is sticking into my heel."

He gazed round about him for a moment or two, then, picking up a large stone, said, "Take your shoe off. I'll try and knock down the nail."

Josephine removed the shoe and handed it to him. Then the ludicrousness of the situation struck her. The clumsy paper parcel in the middle of the road; she, sitting on the ground minus a shoe, and Andrew in his immaculate light suit kneeling by the wayside as he pounded energetically at the troublesome nail. She began to laugh, but her mirth was suddenly quenched by a remark from her companion as, having handed her back the shoe, he took out his watch. "I say!" he exclaimed. "If we don't hurry up we shall lose the last train."

She slipped on her shoe and rose to her feet. "Oh, Andrew!" she cried, looking at him with a sudden fear in her eyes.

He caught up the parcel with one hand and held out the other to help her along.

"Can we do it?" she asked, accepting his assistance, and quickening her steps to keep pace with his long strides.

He avoided her eyes as he answered lightly, "I hope so."

Something in his manner struck a note of fear which had been lately silenced between them, and her heart began to beat thickly. "Oh, Andrew! don't let us lose it!" she implored.

"You talk as if I could make it wait for us," he answered irritably. "Don't waste your breath arguing, but *do* hurry more."

As she was already breathless and quite incapable of any further increase of speed, this insistence might seem unreasonable, but the only answer she made was to suggest that circumstances now really justified their abandoning the parcel. "Throw it over the cliff—anywhere," and there was an hysterical catch in her laugh.

"I'll send you some of the best strawberries that can be had from Covent Garden market to-morrow morning," he promised.

"'To-morrow morning,'" she echoed stupidly. Then, "If we lose the train, couldn't we get a motor somewhere?"

"We might at the end of a five-mile walk, and you're done now." Again there was that in his voice which alarmed her, something which roused the suspicion that he did not *want* to catch the train.

They spoke no further, reserving all their energies for this race with time. The closeness of the atmosphere increased, there was not a breath of wind anywhere, and far down below the slow waves licked the lonely shore in a line of livid foam. The ominous quiet held sway all round, the sound of their hurried breathing alone breaking it.

This ending of a day otherwise so happy was to Josephine a rude awakening. They had been so gay and seemingly secure in each other's company. Their mutual inclinations had been so innocent, and their attitude towards each other so free from self-consciousness. And now an untoward accident had

aroused in them a fear of themselves and each other. The sleeping ghost of their past had risen, and repudiate certain memories as passionately as she might, she found herself weak where she had imagined herself strong.

She urged him on with broken words coming between deep gasping breaths.

He looked at her, and there was a reflection of her own trouble in his face as, putting his arm round her so as almost to carry her along, he said tenderly, "Can't you trust me more than that?"

His very tenderness was an added fear, and she only rejoined, "Is it much farther?"

"About another quarter of a mile," he answered, and she dared not ask him how many minutes remained for the covering of that distance.

The little town on the hillside was now in view, and the sight gave her courage. She could see the station lights shining with a wan gleam in the summer's dusk, and as they reached the steps leading downwards from the cliffs she freed herself from his encircling arm, saying with returning confidence, "I think we shall do it."

But he had seen a wooden arm go down above two red lights. The train was signalled, and he knew the final struggle was to come. He took her hand without answering, and commenced to run. As he did so there sounded on the still air the ringing of a bell. They exchanged glances, but neither spoke, only they continued to run up the long hilly street which led to the station.

She was conscious through all her physical and mental distress of the contrast between themselves and their surroundings. They seemed to be two

unquiet spirits from a world of strife making their brief passage through this little centre of dreaming life. The narrow street was full of the odour of homely cooking. Women stood at their doors with an air of idle expectation, and men in blue woollen jerseys sat on the kerb and smoked. Everywhere, blended with the odour of cooking, was the scent of tarry ropes and of the salt sea.

She looked towards the station lights as a wanderer looks towards home. The bell had ceased ringing and there came on the quiet air the sound of a dull roar. The train was nearing the station, and they were only half-way up the street.

The dull roar of the train seemed to have come close, right into her very ears. A sensation of suffocation seized her, and she stopped. Andrew was saying, "Never mind, Josephine, fate's against us. We meant well—it isn't our fault." It was the old Andrew who had played the part of tempter in Vienna.

Her breath came in a sob and her eyes met his in dumb appeal.

"Good God, Josephine! don't look at me like that," he said hoarsely.

There was an old sailor standing in a doorway near. He had been watching the little scene with a slow curiosity, and at this moment took his pipe out of his mouth and addressed them reassuringly. "There's no need to 'urry the lady," he observed deliberately. "The train won't start until the down express be passed, and that's on'y just signalled."

The practical commonplace nature of this announcement in one moment shattered the emotional structure which their mutual excitement

had raised, and they looked at each other with a shamed consciousness of the shock of returning sanity which each was experiencing. Both gave vent to a forced laugh, then slowly continued their way to the station where the train stood waiting.

CHAPTER VI

Dear Miss Delmar,

I am taking the liberty to inform you of a painful event which occurred here last night. Mignonette, who, by the way, has never told me her surname, was seized with hemorrhage of the lungs and now lies between life and death. I see nothing before her save the infirmary but for your charitable intervention, and I am venturing, unknown to her, to ask your aid.

The situation is very much complicated by the addition of the child which that man *should be keeping.*

I have had her (little Mignon) with me all day, but Thomas objects to children, and I don't like making the poor darling jealous.

Can you, my dear Miss Delmar, make any suggestion or do anything to help in this sad business?

With apologies for this intrusion on your sympathies, believe me,

Yours sincerely,
Vincenza C. Pierpoint.

It was exceedingly hot. All day long the sun-baked streets had absorbed the fierce glare, but the merciful shadows were lengthening as Josephine set forth to answer Miss Vincenza's letter. There

was abroad that premonitory stir of reviving life which anticipates the cool of evening, and the doors of the little row of houses where Mignonette lived were all open. Josephine found herself standing unannounced outside Miss Vincenza's room. From the little passage-way she could see into the dim, grey interior where Miss Vincenza chose to live in a perpetual twilight of closed blinds, odorous of ancient articles of clothes and furniture. The old lady sat at the table, writing, and on the floor was little Mignon, talking in baby fashion to a woolly lamb she carried in her arms.

Josephine tried to catch the child's eye, but Mignon was too engrossed with her toy to look up. Miss Vincenza, however, whose hearing was sharp, rose to her feet with difficulty, holding out a beringed hand. "Allow me to close the door; I have a private communication to make," and she began to hobble painfully across the room.

Josephine intercepted her, and as little Mignon's attention wandered from the woolly lamb towards the visitor, the latter held out her arms with a look which children understand.

Miss Vincenza rose to her feet again, saying, "If you will kindly nurse Mignon while you are here, Miss Delmar, I will take Thomas down from his perch. I put him on the mantelpiece out of Mignon's way, and although the poor darling has been most patient, I'm sure he will be glad to be set free."

"How is Mignonette this evening?" asked Josephine anxiously.

"Very ill," replied Miss Vincenza with emphasis. "She has been delirious all day."

Josephine held the child close and waited for more.

"Yes," began Miss Vincenza mysteriously, "that poor girl upstairs is quite light-headed. Do you think, Miss Delmar, that words spoken in delirium are to be interpreted as facts? When, for instance, a woman repeats constantly a man's name—isn't that name most likely to be her lover's?"

"And if it is, I don't see what use the information would be to us," replied Josephine, feeling a repugnance to the discussion. There seemed to her something ghoulish in Miss Vincenza's rabid curiosity, and she shrank from the idea of the strange old woman listening to poor Mignon's unconscious revelations. "Even if we knew his name," she continued, "what could we do?"

Miss Vincenza looked at Josephine significantly like one who wishes to arouse curiosity for the pleasure of satisfying it. Her straight, short, white hair was brushed forward to form a fringe over her forehead, and her eyes—bright and clear, for she needed no glasses—had something in them of a monkey-like cunning. But Josephine was not prepared to attach any particular importance to hints from Miss Vincenza, and answered, "I really don't understand you."

Miss Vincenza sat back in her chair with a significant little laugh. "Perhaps," she said, "you will, when I tell you his name is 'Andrew'"

Her hearer experienced a sudden shock and sought to hide the involuntary movement of her body by clasping the child a little more closely to her. "Andrew!" she repeated, in an expressionless tone. "It's a very common name."

Miss Vincenza was watching her visitor keenly, with a triumphant pleasure in the dramatic possibilities of the situation quite apart from any real sympathy with it. "True," she rejoined, "but suppose I can, in addition, give you a description of this Andrew's personal appearance."

Josephine softly stroked little Mignon's round arm. "Didn't you do so before," she asked. "I remember your saying something about his having a 'distinguished appearance.'"

"Yes," replied Miss Vincenza precisely, "that was the term. "It's rather odd he should so unmistakably convey such an impression, seeing that he is scarcely middle height, and of slender build."

Josephine was beginning to feel the atmosphere of the room stifling, and she rose to her feet with the child still in her arms. "It seems to me," she said, "that you have something to say which you feel a delicacy in mentioning. Please don't consider my feelings, but tell me at once."

Miss Vincenza clasped her hands in her lap and looking at Josephine blandly, said: "Were you walking down Wilton Road near Victoria Station yesterday morning about eleven o'clock, with a fair gentleman in a light grey suit? Pardon my asking the question."

"Yes," replied Josephine briefly, "I was."

"Pray again pardon me," continued Miss Vincenza, with increasing blandness, "but is that gentleman's Christian name 'Andrew'?"

"It is."

Josephine brought out the words with difficulty, holding little Mignon very close to her, as if to

shield herself with the child's body from some approaching danger.

Miss Vincenza leaned forward in her chair. "My meaning is clear, I presume," she said conclusively.

"Quite clear. I will see what can be done."

"And you do not mind my having mentioned this?"

"No, you were right to do so."

"Of course," began Miss Vincenza, "you understand that I am suggesting nothing—about yourself. Your social position is, I should imagine, the same as his, and doubtless you had no idea of his character. How should you!"

"Miss Vincenza," said Josephine unsteadily, "may I leave little Mignon here while I go and see her mother, and will you kindly put on the child's outdoor clothes and call a cab for me. I am going to have her to stay with me until her mother gets better—or worse!"

"Oh, certainly," replied the other briskly, continuing to watch her visitor closely meanwhile. "I'm sure it's exceedingly kind of you to interest yourself in this sad case, and if you *can* get any help for that poor thing upstairs from Mr. Andrew (I have to call him that, not knowing his surname) I am sure you will be doing a good work."

Outside in the passage Josephine paused. The back door at the end was open, and she saw through its outlet the little yard paved with cobble-stones and the cool-looking green branches of a lilac bush. She stood irresolute, feeling a desperate longing for a brief respite before taking further action. But Mrs. Dobbs at this moment made her appearance at

the foot of the stairs and accosted her with an air of relief. "Oh, Miss Delmar," she said, "I *am* glad to see you. That poor young creature upstairs is so ill! I'm willing enough to do all *I* can, but there's my own work and a baby three months old to see to."

"I will send a nurse to-morrow," said Josephine. "I'm sorry I have an engagement this evening or I would stay now, but I can be back here about half-past eleven, and will sit up with Mignon to-night."

"Indeed, miss," replied the other, with good-natured decision, "I can't think of allowin' you to tire yourself by coming back here again to-night. I can manage quite well now I know I am goin' to have help to-morrow. But what about the child? That old lady," nodding her head contemptuously in the direction of Miss Vincenza's door, "is only fit to look after cats."

Josephine reassured the other on this point and continued her way upstairs.

As she ascended she heard the sound of a low voice in monotonous and incessant speech; the door of Mignon's room stood open and through it came the weary repetition of her fevered wanderings.

Josephine entered and walked towards the bed. Mignon looked at her with no sign of recognition in her eyes. "I'm very sorry, madam," she began deprecatingly, "but I really haven't been able to finish those silk petticoats; there were so many tucks in them and they took longer than I expected."

"It's I, Mignon," said Josephine—"don't you know me?" As she spoke she sat down on the edge of the

bed and took Mignonette's hand. Fever had given her back a semblance of her old beauty. Mrs. Dobbs had parted the fair hair in the middle, and it fell loose on each side of the face, completing the classic suggestiveness of the picture. The girl's nightdress was unfastened at the throat, revealing an emaciation which filled the onlooker with horror, and the sound of her laboured breathing was the agonised resistance of life hard pressed by death.

And this was Andrew's work! The Andrew with whom she had been passing long hours of light talk and easy laughter—the man whom she had wished to love. This coward! In the torture of the thought she found out how very near to really loving him she had been—with what a kindly grace his picture had been presented to her inward vision, and with what tender leniency she had been thinking of his past errors.

But Mignon was speaking. "Yes, sir," she was saying, "they are the 'Dean Hole's' and each blossom is one shilling. Would you like me to put some of them into the bouquet . . . You want to know my name? It is Mignonette, but every one calls me Mignon."

"Mignonette!" Josephine repeated the name softly, enclosing Mignon's hot hand in her own cool one.

The invalid turned her vacant eyes on her visitor. "Who said that?" she asked suddenly. "*He* always called me Mignonette; no one else ever did——" Then she paused as if listening. "He's calling me now," she repeated, "but there's such a noise in the streets I can't hear properly . . . he said he would come, and he's never failed me before——"

There was the sound of a movement in the room and Josephine turned to find the doctor standing beside her. They were old friends, and she greeted him gladly. "I didn't know Mignon was a patient of yours, Dr. Kennerly," she exclaimed.

"I was sent for last night when she was seized with hemorrhage," he explained. He was standing with his hands behind him as he spoke, looking down at Mignon frowningly. Josephine had often seen that look on his face before, and had interpreted it in her own fashion as one of resentment at the pain of others, and irritation with himself for being so easily moved at the sight of it. To her it seemed a tragedy that such a man should have entered such a profession. But there was no other possessing such gentleness and skill to whom she would sooner have commended Mignon, and she experienced a restful consciousness of sharing her burden with so sympathetic a helper. "She's very ill," she whispered, glancing towards the bed.

"She is dying." Dr. Kennerly brought out the words with what to one who did not know him would have seemed brutal indifference, and abruptly turned way from the bed.

Josephine followed him to the window. "How long do you think it will be?" she asked.

"It's impossible to say—exactly. If the hemorrhage returns it may be in an hour. If not, she may last for days."

"Do you think she will regain consciousness?"

"Most probably."

"If she does, might she see some one——?"

Dr. Kennerly turned his keen dark eyes full on his

companion. "What is it?" he asked abruptly. "There's some story here, I imagine."

"Yes—the old one."

"Ah, I thought so; there's a child, isn't there?"

"Yes, she's downstairs. I'm going to take her home with me now."

He looked at her frowningly. "I hope you realise the responsibility you are incurring," he said gravely.

"I don't think there *will* be any responsibility."

There was curiosity in his glance now; but all he said was: "Oh, well, it's your business, and I suppose you know it better than I do."

He was walking towards the bed again as he spoke and Josephine accompanied him. "You didn't answer my question," she said.

He took no notice of her remark, but closed his fingers round Mignon's wrist to feel her pulse. This done, he gently laid the hand he had been holding on the bed, observing its attenuation, and studying the shape of the finger nails with an air of thoughtful interest.

"It's eight o'clock, and he said he would come at seven . . ." Mignon was speaking again and the doctor with a start turned on her his frowning attention—"and I'm so tired. Oh, Andrew, you would come if you knew how tired I am, and how long I've been waiting . . . you were always so kind, so kind . . . that is why I love you so much . . ."

The doctor turned suddenly and beckoned to Josephine to accompany him to the door. "Is this man to be found?" he asked, giving her a piercing glance.

"Yes," she answered. "I know him well; he is —a friend."

"Um!" The doctor's gaze continued its study of her own countenance. Then, with a gesture of finality, he said, "Let her see him as soon as she regains consciousness. The poor child is dying—if it hasten the event so much the better for her," and with a brief word of farewell he departed.

CHAPTER VII

"OH, miss! isn't she a darling!" Martha had just put little Mignon into a new frock, and stood her on a chair to get a comprehensive view of the effect.

Josephine, looking at the child, noticed with a start the unmistakable likeness to Andrew, in the carriage of the head, and the expression of the eyes. She was a dainty little creature, all too small for her age, with a pallor of complexion pathetically suggestive of confinement in a close atmosphere, but brimming over with vitality and childish gaiety. "Mignon wants to get down and see Tom," she announced, impatient of Martha's fussy adjustment of the frock. It had been the constant request since Josephine brought her home the night before; only once had she asked for her mother, but her demands for Thomas had been incessant.

Martha looked worried. "Do you think, miss, if you was to buy her a toy cat it would satisfy her?" she said.

"We'll get one and see."

"Shall I go now?" Martha was eager to be off.

"No, not now," answered her mistress quickly. "I'm expecting a visitor, and I want you to mind Mignon while I see him. There," she continued, "I

hear the bell now. Let me carry Mignon into the other room while you answer the door."

Josephine caught up the child and, carrying her into the next room, put her upon the bed. Martha was opening the door. Yes, it was Andrew—he was punctual. She had written him a note asking him to call at three o'clock that afternoon, and the ordeal of telling him about Mignon was close at hand.

He was standing with his hands in his pockets, whistling and looking out of the window when she entered. He turned gaily hearing her footsteps, and came towards her holding out his hand. "You were a brick to send for me," he said. "I was just wanting an excuse to call."

She allowed him to take her hand and seated herself opposite him.

He glanced at her with surprise. "I say, Josephine," he exclaimed, "what's the matter? You look like a ghost and your hands are as cold as ice."

"I've a bad headache," she said, feeling quite unable to begin her painful task.

"Then why on earth didn't you go to bed instead of sending for me?"

She sent a shrinking glance in his direction.

"Because I have something to say to you," she began breathlessly.

His eyes sought her troubled countenance. "What is it, Josephine? Are you in money difficulties? Because if that's so we'll soon put matters straight."

"It isn't my trouble," she said, "it's another person's."

He continued to look at her curiously. "A man's?" he asked.

"No—a woman's. It's about a girl—a poor girl who has been cruelly wronged and deserted by a man whom she loved and trusted."

He moved uneasily in his seat. "A common enough story," he remarked.

"Yes, common enough; but this girl is no common character. She gave that man a devotion which was as great as it is rare."

"Did she?" he answered, with such ambiguous emphasis that the remark might have been taken for cynicism or comprehensive sympathy.

"Yes, she did, and now she is dying."

He rose to his feet and took a few steps away; then he turned, and standing in front of Josephine said, "I imagine you have some reason for telling me this—what is it?"

She looked at him, realising the charm of his personality—his dangerous gift of pleasing, and, burying her face in her hands, she said, "Oh, Andrew, how could you do it?"

He re-seated himself beside her, and pulling her hands away from her face repeated in a low voice, "What is it?"

"It's Mignon."

He started and turned an excited gaze on his companion. "Mignon!" he exclaimed. "What! little Mignonette! Where is she? Do you know?"

"Yes, I've done so for a long time, but I didn't learn until yesterday that you were the cause of her ruin."

He rose to his feet again and began to walk the room. "My God, at last!" he cried.

Josephine looked at him with searching inquiry. "Did you *want* to find her?" she asked.

He laughed strangely. "*Want* to find her!" he repeated ironically, gazing before him with unseeing eyes.

It was Josephine's turn now to be startled. The look, the words were a revelation, and came with that rude shock which accompanies the casting away of reserve—the unveiling of some feeling of hidden depth. She had never known this Andrew, and in the midst of her passionate indignation, her pain and shrinking from the task before her, there came a more personal emotion—a feeling of vague, disappointed chill, that *she* had failed to penetrate the depths now so unconsciously laid bare. "I don't understand you," she said. "If you didn't want to lose sight of her why did you abandon her?"

"It's a long story. On the night I was to have met her I had a wire calling me to my mother's death-bed, and I was ordered back to France at a moment's notice—the day she died."

"But you have never made any attempt to find Mignonette."

He looked at his companion with something of dull resentment. "How do you know I made no attempt?" he asked.

Josephine began to feel at a disadvantage, his attitude taking her so completely by surprise. "Then you did try?" she said.

"Try? Yes, I've tried. I wrote to the florist's where she used to work, but she had left and they could tell me nothing of her, and on my return to London I haunted the streets where we used to meet, and looked into the face of every girl I passed. Often

and often I have turned and followed some figure which suggested hers, and although I have long since given up hope of finding her, my walks in the London streets are always a half-conscious quest."

"If only it had been a successful one!" said Josephine, with despairing sadness.

"What do you mean? What has happened to her? My God, Josephine, don't tell me she has——?"

Josephine shook her head. "No," she said, "she always hoped to see you again—she loves you."

"I know. She is the only woman who ever did."

There was a strange tenderness in his tones, mingled with an underlying note of bitterness which Josephine had never heard there before.

"Tell me, Josephine," he implored, "what has happened to Mignonette? What is this misfortune at which you hinted? I can bear anything rather than the knowledge that I have driven her to the streets."

His companion looked at him with a return of her former passionate indignation. "It's such as you," she said, "who drive women to that fate. I marvel that you could have inspired in her a love so great as to be her protection."

He rose to his feet and began to pace the room with restless strides. "Tell me where she is, and take me to her. I will make her the only reparation a man can make. She shall be my wife."

"It's too late now," replied Josephine reluctantly.

He stopped in his restless walk to and fro, and

standing in front of her said roughly, "Is she dead?"

"No, but she's dying."

He stood looking at Josephine with expressionless eyes. "Too late," he said mechanically.

At this moment the handle of the door was rattled from the outside, and Josephine's heart began to beat with an odd irregularity. She walked towards the door and opened it softly. Outside on the mat stood little Mignon.

"I am taking care of her while her mother is ill," explained Josephine.

Little Mignon meanwhile turned a large, doubting gaze on Andrew, and with a quick movement sidled up to her protectress. "Nonon wants Tom," she said, seeing in this new-comer fresh possibilities of the satisfaction of her desire.

"What does she say?" he asked, a gleam of interest breaking through his troubled preoccupation, and the ghost of a smile at the corners of his mouth.

"She says she wants Thomas," replied Josephine, with a reflection of Andrew's ghostly smile. "Thomas is a cat."

"Buy her a doll," he said, making a gesture of careless invitation to the child.

Mignon pulled her hand from Josephine's and advanced slowly towards Andrew. "Man get Tom for Nonon?" she said interrogatively.

"What is she calling herself?" he asked Josephine, with a start and a frown.

The latter suddenly perceived a way out from the difficulty facing her. "Andrew," she said, "if you will wait for me a few minutes I will take you to Mignonette. The child's name is Mignon," and

without giving him time to answer she went out of the room, leaving the pair together.

She dawdled over the putting on of her outdoor things, listening meanwhile with strained ears for any sound from the direction of the drawing-room. She held a long consultation with Martha about nothing in particular. Then, with a beating heart, she approached the closed door which separated the father and child from herself.

Outside it she stopped, holding her breath. There was a murmur of voices within, and she stood for several minutes not finding sufficient courage to enter, then came the sound of the child's infectious laugh, and Josephine turned the handle of the door.

She caught her first view of the pair unperceived by either of them. Andrew was seated on the couch with Mignon on his knee. One of his hands was clasping her small form closely to him, the other was under her chin, lifting the little face near to his own. "Won't you give me a kiss?" he was saying unsteadily.

Mignon looked doubtfully at the clean-shaven lips, then approached them gingerly. "Nonon kiss man!" she said, with that air of virtuous triumph which accompanies the performance of a praiseworthy, but somewhat distasteful task.

Andrew having submitted to the offered caress became aware of Josephine's presence, and, lifting Mignon off his knee, rose to his feet.

"It's the realisation of my worst fear," he said, in a tone of stricken remorse.

"Then I need not fill in the details of the story now?"

"No," he answered, with disarming humility,

" you need not, Josephine. Your words could not paint it in blacker colours than my imagination does."

" There is still a little time left," she reminded him. " Shall we go now, Andrew ? "

" Yes, now—now at once," he replied, with hoarse eagerness.

CHAPTER VIII

JOSEPHINE never knew what happened at the meeting between Mignon and Andrew, save that the former had been recalled from the land of unconsciousness by her lover's voice, and had since revived in marvellous fashion. Her talk now was all of the future—the future with her idol. For such absolute self-forgetting as hers, such trust and infinite devotion, were the attributes of worship of the divine, rather than human love for a human object. Mignon's love was her religion, and Josephine wondered how it would have withstood the shock of inevitable disillusionment consequent on a marriage with its object.

But for Mignon there was reserved a fate more tender than that given to the majority of mortals. She was going to die, as she had lived, without tasting of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Dr. Kennerly had pronounced her improvement but the forerunner of the end, and that end very near.

It was three days since the meeting between the two, and Josephine had just learned from Miss Vincenza that Mignon had had another attack of hemorrhage that morning. The visitor's heart ached for the poor sufferer lying in the small, close room. The day had been one of sultry heat and Josephine paused to take breath on the landing

outside Mignon's door, which was partly open. There was no sound from within and, fearing to disturb its occupant, Josephine peeped through the opening, hoping to catch the eye of the nurse. Instead she saw something which arrested her unwilling attention. Andrew was seated on the bed, his arms round Mignon, while her head lay on his breast. Her eyes were closed and she appeared to be sleeping, but as Josephine looked, the dying girl raised her arm and, encircling her lover's neck, drew herself still more closely to him. His clasp of her attenuated form tightened, and to the watcher it seemed they clung to each other in fear of a Dread Presence which was beginning to make itself felt throughout the little house.

Downstairs Mrs. Dobbs was crooning her baby to rest, and the words of the hymn she was singing came languidly through the drowsy heat of the summer evening. With a quick imagination peculiar to herself, Josephine felt she was standing lonely between two worlds of love—maternal love and wedded love. She had turned her eyes from their involuntary intrusion on the latter, but her ears caught some murmured words in Andrew's voice which caused her to creep softly down the stairs—away from the two who needed none but each other. She stole like some guilty creature past Miss Vincenza's door, for she dreaded just then, with an indescribable dread, the words and companionship of the strange old woman, and having gained the street, started walking rapidly despite her fatigue.

It was one of those hours when even the most ardent lover of London felt his devotion put to a painful test. Everywhere was an oppressive

monotony of noise, dust and heat, and it seemed to her that even the inanimate buildings were oppressed by a sense of impotent weariness

The time she had intended giving the invalid was unappropriated, and the thought of going home to any of her usual employments was distasteful. A restless sense of dull unhappiness possessed her, and she passed through the streets mechanically, feeling a loathing for their familiarity and exhausted atmosphere.

As she turned a corner she saw Erasmus standing outside a secondhand bookseller's. He had an open book in his hands which he had apparently taken from some shelves fixed just inside the doorway, and the shabby-looking volume was absorbing him so completely that he appeared quite oblivious of the rush of life around him.

She looked at him with something of that feeling of relief which the presentment of a fresh object may bring to one in pain. But while she hesitated as to whether to speak to him, her footsteps were carrying her on, and she continued her way too inert to make the required effort.

Presently she passed under the shadow of a high brick wall which stretched upwards far above the shops and houses around. At the base of the wall an arched door stood open, and she looked listlessly through the aperture into a long, dark passage. Some impulse led her to accept the silent invitation. She entered, traversed the passage, and, lifting a thick curtain which hung at the further end, found herself in an empty church.

Thought, for the moment, was suspended. The quiet of the place was as the quiet of a tomb. Down

the long passage and through the half-open door came the sound of the street's life—an incessant echo of passing footsteps, the rumble of traffic, and the air of "Old Madrid" played on a piano organ. But the restless turmoil outside only intensified the stillness within. Seven red lamps hung before the altar, their lights flickering with steady oscillations like feebly throbbing hearts. She watched them and thought of Mignon—of Mignon and Andrew. The scene she had just witnessed was like the last picture painted on the retina of the eye before darkness intervenes; she had received no conscious visual impressions since. A knowledge she had long sought for had come to her at last. She had puzzled over the mystery of Andrew's personality; now she knew who held the key—it was Mignonette. Andrew had never looked at herself as he had looked at Mignonette that evening—had never spoken to her with the voice he had spoken to Mignon. But then she, Josephine, had never loved Andrew, and Mignon had.

What was the cause of this dull pain that possessed her, was it jealousy? Could she be so unreasonable? No, it was something deeper. The old trouble which the reading of Erasmus's book had stirred in her was again uppermost, and she stood convicted of having trifled with the realities of life.

She wondered whether things would have been different had she loved Andrew in the days of their young intercourse. But great affections have great responsibilities, and such responsibilities had been unwelcome. She knew she was stronger than Andrew—how she hated the thought!—she also knew that she had shrunk from taking up some

burden which was the inevitable outcome of their relationship.

What was the meaning—the use of her life? she asked herself. A mood of something like despair was beginning to take possession of her, and she surrendered herself to its influence with a certain satisfaction in loosing the bonds of self-control. It was the mute invitation to this indulgence in the luxury of sorrow which had drawn her into the church, and for the time being she gave herself up to it—sitting there motionless and inert while the tide of depression rolled over her.

The quiet of the place deepened as the light of the summer evening failed, and at last she began to be conscious of a subsidence of those waters of affliction. High up, overhead, was an open window, and through it she saw a corner of the church tower against a triangle of pale sky. Two sparrows were sleepily calling to each other there, and the contented tone of their utterances was pleasant to hear.

A door banged, and a quiet-footed verger entered and began to turn on the electric lights. In his wake followed two or three intending worshippers. The church began to assume an aspect of cheerful life, and the spell of its death-like quiet was broken. She rose to her feet, and made her way towards the door.

As she emerged from it she was conscious of having left behind some burden of self, and began to busy her thoughts with plans for little Mignon. She was passing a toy shop at the moment and, perceiving a very realistic presentment of a black cat in the window, went promptly inside and bought it.

Emerging from the shop with her parcel she was

accosted by Erasmus. "How d'y do?" he said, stopping in front of her.

Erasmus's greetings were always something to be glad of. There was invariably such a spontaneous gleam of pleasure in his grey eyes, coupled with such a willing surrender of himself to the occasion.

Josephine looked first at him, then glanced at the book he was carrying underneath his arm. "You bought it, then," she said, returning his smile.

An expression of inquiry came into his eyes, but he gave it no voice, only answering, "Of course I bought it. It's 'The Italian Renaissance,' and only two shillings!"

"I saw you reading outside Issac's nearly an hour ago; have you been standing there reading ever since?" she asked.

"It's the natural inference. Let me carry your parcel, I believe we are going the same way."

She handed him the parcel, and in doing so the tissue paper covering broke, and two glass eyes in a furry head were displayed to view. "Oh, I say!" he exclaimed, "what a jolly little beast," and he enlarged the hole in the wrapper to get a better view of the toy inside. Then he tucked the parcel under his disengaged arm, so that the cat's head protruded beyond this shelter, and continued his way, quite regardless of the glances turned on him by passers in the street.

Josephine, glancing at him, was struck by something *impersonal* in his attitude. It was this same impersonality which had always isolated Erasmus in her thoughts, from the vital, practical interests of life. This "ghostliness," as she fancifully termed it, struck her with a sense of impending tragedy.

She remembered a remark Barbara Langton had once made to her. "Mark my words," the latter had said in portentous fashion, "Erasmus has trouble in store for him. I always think when looking at him of a blind man walking along the edge of a cliff. I must admit, though, it was his blindness which was his safeguard with that abominable Mrs. ——," and the speaker had suddenly stopped in apparent fear of committing an indiscretion of speech.

Josephine, looking at him now, wondered what was the affair to which his aunt had alluded. He was sauntering along in leisurely fashion, the heat of the evening disposing him to loiter. Under one arm was the book, and under the other her parcel. His eyes were fixed absently on the pavement, and his look and attitude suggested a meditative enjoyment of existence.

He made no comment on her sudden silence—taking it, as he took herself, with equanimity—and was walking, unheeding, right past her destination, when she stopped him. "Will you come in?" she asked.

"I should like to do so," he said, "but I've a sort of idea that there is a reason why I ought not," and, as she ascended the stairs leading to the door of her flat after having said good-bye to him, she reflected that he had asked her no question about the destination of the toy. Andrew would have been full of curiosity, to which he would not have hesitated to give expression. Neither had Erasmus commented on the unusually long interval which had elapsed between their last and present meeting. Andrew would have done so, even had the possibility of their never meeting again been a matter of complete

indifference to him. Erasmus had made no sign of having noticed the fact that she had been crying. Andrew would have seen it at the first glance, and would have offered her his masculine idea of consolation—some flowers, a new book, an invitation to dine out. Yet she knew that Erasmus, as her friend, would make real sacrifices for her—should the need arise—sacrifices which Andrew, even as her lover would never dream of making.

CHAPTER IX

ABOUT eleven o'clock that same evening Josephine sat reading in her little drawing-room. She was in no mood for bed, the heat of the night making sleep improbable, and so she had opened wide the French window, and seated just inside it, lay in wait to catch any stray breeze that might wander past. At last even the slight addition to the heated atmosphere caused by the lamp seemed unbearable, and she closed her book impatiently and turned down the light to a mere glimmer.

In the ensuing gloom she became aware of an intermittent illumination coming from the outside, as if consequent on the opening and shutting of some vast door in the heavens. One minute the room was lit with a broad stare of naked light, and the next plunged in stifling darkness, and this panorama of nature was conducted in a sinister stillness which created in the observer a feeling of strained suspense. Although she knew little Mignon was asleep in the next room, and Martha in bed in another room at the end of the corridor, she began to experience a nervous sense of loneliness, which made her wish the child would wake and cry, or that Martha would put in an appearance, saying she was frightened, and wanted company. She longed for the first patter of raindrops or the distant rumble of thunder; but

nothing happened, save that noiseless exhibition of blue light alternating with black darkness.

A terrible storm was evidently brewing, and the question of going to bed was now definitely settled in the negative. She turned up the wick of the lamp again, preferring rather to bear the additional heat than watch the opening and shutting of that door in the heavens. Then once more she took up her book and tried to concentrate her thoughts on it. But her attention wandered. The silence was broken by footsteps on the stairs. They came on, higher and higher, some one doubtless going to the flat just below. No, they had passed that, and must be coming to her own, which was at the top of the building.

What, or whom, could it be? A summons perhaps to Mignonette, whose hour had come. She stood waiting for the tinkle of the bell. It came—faintly, as if pulled by a feeble or frightened hand. She hesitated for a moment, wondering whether she should call Martha, then, ashamed of her cowardice, went alone to the door.

As she opened it the other door above opened also, and the late caller stood fully revealed in the blue, naked light. It was Andrew.

He said no word, but, walking in with uncertain steps, made his way to the drawing-room and dropped into a corner of the couch. Josephine followed him in dumb perplexity, and, turning his glance upon her, he nodded his head in the direction of a chair opposite.

She sat down with the instinctive obedience of a child, looking at him with something like terror in her eyes. "Andrew! you're ill!" she cried.

He looked at her stupidly. "Ill!" he echoed, "No, I'm not ill. What put that into your head?"

His eyes were sunken and bloodshot, and his hand which lay along the back of the couch twitched spasmodically as he spoke.

"Oh, Andrew! you *are* ill," she insisted, and she rose excitedly to her feet.

"Sit down," he answered irritably, "I'm all right, only . . ."

"It's Mignon?" she breathed.

"Yes, that's it——" he said, bringing out the words with a jerk. "She's dead."

"*Dead!*" Josephine repeated the word mechanically, then again softly, as one would utter a benediction.

He shifted his bodily position, as if seeking relief from physical pain. "Yes, that's it, Josephine—she's dead."

The listener waited, and the stillness of the night made mute testimony to the hopelessness of human speech to express human sympathy.

"Were you there?" she asked at last.

A violent shudder seized him. "Yes," he said, "I was there; don't ask me about it, . . ."

Josephine leaned towards him. "You made her very happy—just at the last?" she said.

He looked at his companion, as if he had only at that moment realised her presence. "It's my cursed fate to be able to do that easily," he replied; "but I've had my reward."

"What do you mean?" she asked, thinking it best to encourage him to talk.

"What do I mean!" he echoed, with extreme bitterness. "Why, it's lightly give and lightly take with every woman I've ever known, save *her*—and perhaps *you*," he continued, as if with a sudden

recognition of something that hadn't occurred to him before.

"She loved you," said Josephine quietly.

"Yes, she loved me and believed in me. You didn't love me, because you *couldn't* believe in me—you were always blest with clearness of vision."

"A doubtful blessing," she said, with a sigh.

He appeared to be sunk in despairing thought for a minute or two, then, glancing across at her, said disjointedly, "And *you, too*—Good God, what a record!"

"Andrew," she began earnestly, "Mignon loved you and never felt she had anything to forgive. I—if I felt differently—I have forgiven you, as you know. Can't you leave the past alone?"

"And do you suppose I have nothing more to regret than that which you already know?" he asked with cynicism.

"No," she answered, in a depressed tone, "I imagined there was more."

"You will not need to exercise your imagination. I will tell you the facts," he threatened.

She clasped her hands in helpless distress. "Oh, don't, Andrew!" she implored.

"Why do you shrink from hearing the truth about me?" he asked, in a brief interlude of curiosity.

"I don't know—only I *do* want to keep something," she answered incoherently.

"Ah! you're afraid. I told you you wouldn't be able to stand it." As he spoke there sounded a hollow reverberation of thunder in the distance, and one or two large drops splashed on to the leaves of the geraniums in the window boxes outside.

Josephine was silent. She shrank with what she

felt to be cowardice from Andrew's threatened revelation, and felt herself inadequate to meet the need of the moment. It was as much of a challenge to herself as to him when she said at last, "I'm not afraid, Andrew. Try me if you will."

"I could never have told *her*," he continued, thinking aloud.

"*Never*," answered his companion, with solemn conviction, and again they relapsed into silence.

Large drops of rain, few and far apart, fell with slow splashes on to the geranium leaves, and another vivid flash of lightning was followed by a distant reverberation of thunder which continued and increased in volume of sound as it travelled nearer and nearer.

His attention appeared to be suddenly arrested by the approach of the storm in all its force, and he looked round as if only just realising his whereabouts. "What time is it?" he asked confusedly.

"Ten minutes to twelve," she said, glancing at the clock.

He started and looked at her apprehensively. "We are in for a bad storm, and the noise will probably wake up the child and that confounded girl." He rose to his feet. "Martha mustn't find me here; I must go at once," he said, with a sudden return to his usual manner.

"Oh, but you look so ill! Let me get you something to eat or drink," she begged, with profound relief at his change of tone. "I can make it all right with Martha."

"Nonsense!" he replied impatiently. "Do you think I'm going to risk scandal? Haven't I done you

enough harm already!" and he made his way hurriedly to the door.

She followed him, and when they reached it paused, facing him. "Andrew," she said, "you know, don't you . . . and nothing you could have told me would have made any difference. We are always friends."

He gripped her hand with such force as to cause her pain. "If I hadn't remembered *you* were here I should have thrown myself into the river to-night," he replied.

"Always come," she said. "I don't think I should like you to go to anyone else."

Then they exchanged good nights quietly, and she stood at the open door until the echo of his footsteps grew faint below.

CHAPTER X

"THE cab's at the door, miss." Martha's voice shook and her eyelids were red.

"Very well, Martha, we shan't be long," said her mistress with forced cheerfulness, as she struggled with the last hook on little Mignon's frock.

Martha stood waiting her turn with the child's hat in her hand. The hat was placed at the right angle on top of the flaxen head, and the wearer taken into a stifling embrace. "Say good-bye to Martha," said that personage in a lugubrious voice.

Josephine looked at the girl warningly. "You know what I told you!"

"Oh, yes, I know well enough," replied Martha, with a note of resentment in her voice; "but it isn't human nature to——" She broke down suddenly and fled to the kitchen.

"Martha dorn," stated little Mignon dejectedly, as she looked after the flying figure.

"Yes, darling, but you are coming for a ride with me, and going to see Man."

The taxi was at the door and Martha had placed inside it the small portmanteau containing little Mignon's wardrobe. The journey on which the two were starting was a sad one. Josephine was going to meet Andrew at Victoria Station, and together they were to travel to Dover with the child and another silent passenger who would go no more

journeys. Mignon the elder was to be taken to the place of her birth to be buried, and Mignon the younger was to be confided to the care of her mother's married sister.

Josephine had begged for the custody of the child, but Andrew—with that new thoughtfulness for her which had developed in him lately—had refused. "No," he said, "there would be difficulties, questions would be asked, and the true explanation would be impossible. The child's aunt is her most natural guardian, and her mother wished it."

Andrew had been constantly backwards and forwards to the flat since the night of Mignon's death, and there had been many talks between them on practical matters. He had expressed his intention of seeing as much of the child as possible, and there was a hopefulness in his manner which Josephine had noted and welcomed.

There had been no further reference between them to the visit he had paid her after leaving Mignon's death-bed. He had called the next morning to ask her advice about the funeral arrangements, and to tell her his plans for the child, and she felt then that he shared her relief at the interruption of their interview of the night before.

He had asked to see the child, and on all his subsequent visits had taken unconcealed pleasure in her company. "I like 'Man,'" Mignon had announced, after the bestowal of her second kiss. Josephine, with a strange want of tact had once, in Andrew's presence, reproved her for addressing him in such fashion, and he had flushed suddenly, saying, with an odd look of embarrassment, "Let her call me what she pleases."

The cab drew up at Victoria Station, and the child gave a sudden spring of delight on recognising Andrew, who stood there awaiting them. It seemed to Josephine that Mignon the elder had left to her child a legacy of something of her own passionate devotion to Andrew. His response, as a rule, was very ready, but this morning he was preoccupied and took no notice of little Mignon beyond clasping her small hand in his own as she trotted beside him. He led them in the direction of the booking office, and as they went Josephine asked, "Has it come?"

"No, not yet," he answered briefly, and the trio continued their way in silence.

He took their tickets, then joined Josephine at the outer door of the booking office, where they stood waiting with an air of uneasy expectancy. An incessant stream of traffic passed to and fro in the main road towards which they gazed, and occasionally a cab or carriage turned out of it into the approach to the station. They had waited five or ten minutes when Josephine asked rather anxiously, "Isn't it getting late? I hope they won't lose the train."

He took out his watch. "There's another ten minutes to spare yet," he said, then made an involuntary movement which caused her eyes to follow the direction of his. An undertaker's van had turned out of the main road and was coming towards them. Josephine with the child retreated into the booking office, and Andrew went forward to speak to the men accompanying the van. She heard them unfasten it, and presently, as the sound of their slow, careful feet—heavy with the weight they carried—came close, she held little Mignon's hand more tightly and drew further back into the shadow. As

the coffin containing all that remained of Mignon was carried past, Josephine, making comparison between what she knew of Mignon's hopes and dreams, and this bitter reality, struggled with her tears, The undertaker's men staggered on with their burden, people passing cast curious glances towards it, or stood for a moment in respectful silence, and little Mignon gazed at the scene with the fleeting wonder of childhood.

Josephine did not attempt to follow in the wake of the undertaker's men, but stood awaiting Andrew's summons to join him after he had seen the coffin put into the car which was attached to the train.

He came a few minutes later and installed them in an empty carriage. And so they made this strange journey. Andrew held the child in his arms until she went to sleep, when Josephine relieved him of his burden, saying as she did so, " I hate the idea of going back without her."

He looked at her curiously. " I didn't know you were so fond of children," he said.

" Neither am I, indiscriminately. I couldn't love *any* child just because it *was* a child, but I always loved this one from the first day I saw her."

He accepted her explanation with a masculine lack of comment, and they talked no more until they neared the end of their journey. Then he said, " Will you write ? I don't know how long it may be before we meet again. You have this tour in the provinces for August, and I—I don't know what I shall do."

" If you wish me to write I will do so," she said.

" Of course I wish it," he answered, and words not

coming easily to either, they once more ceased from them.

Josephine was beginning to feel an acute sense of forlornness at the thought of the coming parting. The excitement and multitudinous duties of the preceding days had prevented her realising the blank in her life which the withdrawal of these interests would make, and she shrank from turning the last page of this strange chapter of her history.

She wondered where Andrew's drifting propensities would carry him. Probably he would leave England, either for the Continent or abroad. For herself she felt an unusual want of energy, and a shrinking reluctance to go back and begin again the old life.

As the train entered the station the child had to be awakened, and Josephine remarked that she would have to say "good-bye" or she would lose the return express.

Andrew looked at her blankly, as if her announcement was unexpected.

"You knew I had to catch the 1.15?" she said, in answer to his look.

"Oh, yes, of course I knew," he replied vaguely.

"And little Mignon's aunt will be here presently to arrange things and take the child home," continued Josephine, in laboured fashion.

"Oh, yes, of course," he repeated stupidly, continuing to look at her helplessly.

"I won't say good-bye to her," she said in a low voice, nodding her head in the direction of the child, "and you mustn't see me into the train. Let me slip away, now, while she isn't noticing," and she held out her hand in parting.

He took it in a close grip, then he said, "Good-

bye, Josephine ! I've given you nothing but trouble, and you have given me nothing but help."

" No," she answered, with tears in her voice, " not all trouble, some happiness too." Then she pulled her hand from his detaining clasp and, with one last look at the child, walked swiftly away.

CHAPTER XI

ON an afternoon in September, fourteen months later, Josephine sat reading a letter. It was from Andrew, whom she had not seen since that day she had journeyed to Dover with him and little Mignon. He had written intermittently during the interval, and she had done likewise, but as to whether her letters had always reached him she was in doubt, he having travelled so rapidly from place to place during the first six months of his absence. Latterly, however, he had settled in Paris, where he seemed to be resuming his musical studies.

She had therefore been rather surprised to see the Dover postmark on this last letter, and her surprise on reading it gave place to a stir of excitement to which she had now long been a stranger.

"*I'm worried about the kid,*" Andrew wrote. "*These people are well-meaning, but they have evidently had no experience in dealing with any but strong, healthy children like their own, and Mignon looks very seedy. I would like you to see her, and of one thing I am certain—she can't stay here. I must find some one to take care of her who will understand her. I am going up to town in a few days, and propose to bring her with me if you are willing to take her in on our arrival.*"

The rest of the letter was all of his music, the thing which now seemed to fill his thoughts and absorb his energies. She dropped it, and rose to her feet with a triumphant smile on her lips. "Yes, Andrew," she said as if speaking to some one actually present, "you may bring little Mignon to me, but if you think you are ever going to take her away again, you are much mistaken!"

With the smile still on her lips she began to search round for a telegram form. A little picture of Andrew, the child, and herself took sudden shape. She would always keep Mignon. Andrew would settle in London and sway the multitude with his music. They would be great friends, he would come to see her often.

She went out herself to send off the wire, and on leaving the post office walked down Victoria Street and into Parliament Street in a mood of happy preoccupation. As she passed the Horse Guards, she saw a soldier standing at the farther end of the dark, vault-like passage. His brass helmet and red plume made a splash of vivid colour against the yellow ochre light of the late afternoon, and she at once formed a resolution to bring little Mignon here to show her the Guards. She was filled with pleasant excitement at the thought of how she would take the child about, and how Martha and herself would nurse Andrew's little daughter back to health.

Arriving home, she reflected that a letter following on the telegram to Andrew would be necessary. She had previously arranged to spend a few weeks at a quiet little place in Surrey. Why not keep to her arrangement and take Mignon and Martha with her? To-day was Tuesday; she had fixed Saturday for

her departure. If she wrote to Andrew at once he might be able to bring the child to her before then. No sooner had this thought occurred than she put it into action, sending Martha out to post the letter at once.

CHAPTER XII

IT was Friday, and Andrew was to bring little Mignon to London that day. He had written to Josephine saying they would be with her at six o'clock in the afternoon, and she was now busy preparing for their start to-morrow into the country.

Her packing finished, she became restless. It was four o'clock, and she began to wonder how she should pass the hours intervening between now and the arrival of her visitors.

The recollection that she owed Barbara Langton a call came opportunely, and a few minutes later found her waiting for admission at the Langtons' door.

"Not at home," said the parlourmaid. But at that moment Erasmus, with his hands in his pockets, wandered aimlessly into the hall and perceived the caller.

He came forward at once with a sudden access of energy, saying, "Oh, do come in. There's nobody at home to give me any tea."

She accepted his invitation readily and followed him to the drawing-room where the servant had set his solitary tea equipage.

"Let me see," he said with a glance towards a cabinet of old china, "we shall want another cup and saucer."

"Oh, but you mustn't take anything out of that," expostulated Josephine.

He opened the door of the cabinet, and selecting a rare specimen of old Worcester, remarked, "I may—if I like."

"Don't give it to *me*; I should never dare face Barbara if I broke it."

"I was going to suggest that I should use it myself in case it's dusty," he observed, as he adjusted the spirit kettle.

Josephine was watching his absent-minded performance uneasily. He had placed the old Worcester cup and saucer on top of the sugar basin and was now engaged in making experiments by stopping up the spout of the spirit kettle. "Aunt Barbara has gone to a pianoforte recital," he said, as he lowered the flame just in time to save an explosion.

"Has she?" commented Josephine absently, with her eyes on the kettle.

"Yes, and Aunt Priscilla has gone to see the cousin off who has been staying here."

"Has she?" replied Josephine, unable again to achieve anything more original.

"Yes, she has," repeated Erasmus, who apparently began to find Josephine's monosyllables infectious.

She very carefully handed him his cup of tea, then began, "How's the new book going?"

"It's increasing in size," he answered modestly.

"I was reading again some passages in the other one just before I came out."

"Ah!" Erasmus smiled at her through his glasses and dropped two huge lumps of sugar into his small cup of tea.

"Do you know there's something positively un-

canny in the way you unearth motives," she told him.

"It's an entertaining field of research," he observed, as he picked up the crocodile paper-weight and stood it on the arm of his chair.

"Probably, to the onlooker," she supplemented.

"You mean a case of sport for the hounds, and death to the hare? I think, by the way, we discussed this question before. You pleaded guilty to having drawn a parallel, and I told you it was a mistake to do such a thing."

"Yes, because you thought I had another person in my mind. You didn't know that the story told in your book was *my* story."

Josephine could never afterwards account for the impulse which led her to make this confession. There had been no intention of doing so a moment before, and she made the admission without effort, neither realising the forces which had moved her to speak, nor the probable consequences of such a statement. But in the long pause which followed, a sudden and overwhelming sense of having parted with something she could never get back seized her, and she would have given all she possessed to take back her words.

Unable at last to endure his protracted silence, she glanced towards him. He was absently stroking the back of the little brass crocodile, but while she looked at him he suddenly raised his eyes. The smile had gone out of them, and when that was so Erasmus's eyes had a chill expression which was accounted for by his defective sight.

But Josephine was in no mood to ascribe his cold, unconscious stare to such a cause, and interpreted it as a sign of unqualified condemnation of herself.

This made further speech impossible, and she continued to wait for some word from her companion. It came at last, bringing with it a great surprise.

"I imagined something of the sort," said Erasmus simply.

"You imagined it!" Josephine gasped. "You imagined it!" she repeated, "and yet you never made the least sign. I thought I knew you well, Erasmus. But it seems I *didn't*!"

"The idea came in one of those intuitive flashes which sometimes surprise one," he explained. "An involuntary confidence of that sort is sacred—even from oneself. It belongs to those things one knows, and doesn't know."

"But now that I've told you?"

"Aren't you thrusting upon me an office I've no right to fulfil?" he asked.

"What office?" she queried in return.

"That of your judge."

"Perhaps," she said, "I acted on an impulse which your book suggested."

"There is one remark I should like to make apropos of that unfortunate book," he began.

"Yes," she interrupted, "I should like to hear anything you have to say about that."

"I think," he answered, "that your readiness to confound yourself with the chief character in it, is probably due to a distorted view of your own case."

"You don't know—you don't know," she reiterated despairingly.

"Why not tell me all and let me decide that question for myself?"

As Josephine listened to his words, it seemed that a great opportunity was being offered her—one for

which she had been vaguely searching for years, and making a sudden resolution she said, "I'll tell you the whole story from beginning to end."

"Do," he replied briefly, but with characteristic readiness to give an undivided attention.

And then Josephine began the history of those old days in Vienna, of her meeting later with Andrew in London, and of the complications of their subsequent intercourse owing to the interposition of the Mignonette episode.

Erasmus listened quietly, neither commenting on what she said, nor making any attempt to help her out when she occasionally stopped at loss for a word. Now and again she caught him in the act of frowning, but had no knowledge of the particular aspect of her story which surprised him into this open sign of disapproval. At last she paused saying, "That's all," and waited for her listener's verdict.

In the prolonged silence which followed she stole a look at him, and it seemed to her he laboured to suppress the evidence of some feeling of annoyance or irritation. "Don't spare my feelings. . I want the truth, from *you*," she told him.

"You shall have it," he promised. "You are strangely ignorant about yourself, Josephine."

She pondered the statement for a moment or two, then said, "Tell me what you mean?"

"That's done in a very few words. You love this man, Josephine, you probably did so from the first. The fact is evident in every word of your story."

Josephine rose from her seat breathless, a great wave of colour rushing over her face. "Oh, Erasmus!" she cried, and the exclamation was capable of a hundred interpretations.

He looked at her, a strange, quenched look. "Yes," he repeated, "you love him. How on earth you have managed it I fail to understand, but you do."

The colour in Josephine's face now owed its presence to another cause. "You are putting all the blame on him," she said passionately.

He got up from his chair and standing opposite her smiled grimly. "And you," he said, "are proving the truth of my statement."

She stood gazing at him spellbound, while the colour ebbed slowly from her face leaving it deadly pale. Her eyes filled, and covering them with her hand, she said in a broken voice, "God bless you, Erasmus! it *is* true."

He watched her helplessly for a moment or two, then in an odd, constrained voice exclaimed, "Josephine!"

She looked up at him, arrested by something unfamiliar in his manner. His philosophic calm and equanimity had all fled, gone also was the psychologist who read her heart. There remained only a helpless fellow-creature struggling in the first throes of pain. "Josephine," he repeated, "I've found out something about myself, too."

She watched him with a dawning knowledge of what was coming. Surely it could not be that Erasmus——?

"Yes," he continued, "I also have been blind. I had to see you, in imagination, in another man's arms before my eyes were opened to the fact that I love you."

The colour rose slowly in her face and her expression was almost one of guilt as she heard

him. "Oh, Erasmus! What have I done?" she deplored.

"You've provided sport for the gods," he said with a bitterness that sounded strangely from his lips.

"Ah! I've often felt *like that*," she admitted.

He observed her thoughtfully. "I'm trying," he confessed, "to understand how you came to love such a man."

"You are hard on him," she said, striving to conceal her chagrin. "It's all my fault for telling tales."

"Perhaps," he said grimly, "I might have felt more charitable if you had felt less so."

This very human admission came strangely from Erasmus, and it hurt her to see him stripped of his philosophy.

"I'm not worth it," she answered irrelevantly.

"You are yourself—nothing else matters."

"Oh Erasmus! You are as foolish as I am when it comes to loving."

"It may be foolishness—it may be wisdom! We have no choice."

"No—and we wouldn't undo it if we could." They stood seeing in each other's eyes a reflection of the mood of self-surrender that possessed them—conscious of a certain comfort in this odd companionship in suffering.

"We're both in the same boat!" she added with an hysterical catch in her voice.

"Not quite. I think—" he paused as if weighing possibilities. "I think you'll win him, although God knows I should consider it no matter for congratulation."

"Make your mind easy, you won't be called upon

to do violence to your feelings. If Andrew had been going to love me, he'd have done so long ago."

"Don't be so sure of that," and something in the speaker's eyes elicited from her the futile exclamation, "Oh Erasmus! I'm so sorry."

"*I'm* not, Josephine."

Silence followed. She longed to be alone with this new self which Erasmus had given her, but the foolish hope of giving comfort kept her in her seat. As she lingered the door opened and Miss Langton appeared.

"I do think I'm the silliest woman that ever posed for a sane individual," she began.

"I always told you so," declared her nephew. "I knew you'd hustle Beatrice into the wrong train and finish up with getting run over on your way home." He spoke with his usual air of humorous detachment, and Josephine was conscious of a sudden sense of relief.

"Well, *you* needn't talk! How about losing three umbrellas in six weeks, and being carried on to Edinburgh when you wanted to go to York." Miss Langton reminded her nephew.

"That was the guard's fault. He turned another man out at York by mistake."

Miss Langton stared at her nephew reflectively. "It must run in the family," she remarked. "Beatrice was quite disagreeable when the portèr dragged her out of the train at the last minute. She said paying visits here was associated with losing her luggage and having to spend nights in waiting-rooms—but then she *always* exaggerates."

"Yes," agreed Erasmus, "and she has no sense of humour."

Josephine glanced from one to the other of the speakers. There was nothing forced in Erasmus's smile, and it was difficult to believe this was the man who had just declared his hopeless passion for her. For herself it was not so easy to appear unconcerned, and she eagerly seized the first opportunity for escape.

CHAPTER XIII

JOSEPHINE left the Langtons with a dazed sense of seeing the familiar with new eyes. Erasmus seemed fated to play the part of interpreter of her soul, and that in doing so he should discover his own was the ironical sort of situation into which you might expect a person of Erasmus's temperament to be caught.

Erasmus had a contempt for Andrew, and in that contempt Josephine saw the man she loved in an unflattering light. She could not be blind to the fact that Andrew had been weak, cowardly, and selfish, and the knowledge was bitter. She had her ideals, and would not have chosen to love such a man. Erasmus fulfilled her ideal, but she did not love Erasmus. Andrew's image at this moment rose with startling clearness before her mental vision. She saw him in a dozen different aspects; gay with the spontaneous and unthinking gaiety of a devotee of pleasure. Masterful as he was when they met on the ground of their art. Depressed and brooding, helplessly dependent on herself. At the last picture her heart yearned over him with all the tenderness of a mother for an erring child, and she said to herself, "There's only one fact in life for me now—I don't know why, I don't *want* to know why, but I love him."

He was on his way to meet her at this moment, and she glanced at her watch as she ascended the stairs leading to her flat. It was half-past five, later than she had imagined; Andrew and the child would be with her in another half-hour. She rang the bell and waited Martha's tardy response. That personage at last opened the door looking flushed and somewhat dishevelled. "I'm sorry to keep you waiting, miss," she said, "but," with a mysterious inclination of her head in the direction of the drawing-room, "I was busy."

"Busy!" echoed her mistress, in puzzled surprise.

"Yes, you just go in and see, miss."

Josephine experienced a palpitating sense of expectation as she crossed the hall and pushed open the drawing-room door. Then she paused on the threshold, looking with eager gaze past a little figure which was seated on the floor. But there was no one else in the room.

"Mr. Murison brought little Miss Mignon about an hour ago," explained Martha. "He left his card with something written on it."

Josephine took the card and put it in her pocket unread, then she knelt down on the floor beside the child who was busy with a large, grey suéde glove into which she had thrust a tiny hand. She raised her eyes to Josephine's, but there was no recognition in the glance.

Josephine scrambled to her feet and turned to Martha a troubled countenance. "Oh, Martha!" she said, "she doesn't know me, and how thin she has grown!"

"That she has," answered Martha emphatically.

Josephine gazed at the child again, a lump meanwhile rising in her throat. The eager anticipation of the past days had resolved themselves into this bare, sad reality. Andrew had gone off without seeing her, leaving only a message pencilled on his card which all the world might read, and little Mignon looked as if she had come back to die.

Martha with a view to comforting her mistress mentioned the fact that the child had not recognised herself, adding: "A nice treat I've had with her, she nearly shrieked the ceiling down when Mr. Murison tried to get away from her, and she pulled off his gloves, the artful little monkey, because she thought he couldn't go without them——"

Mignon's attention had meanwhile been attracted by Josephine's attitude of despondency, and getting on to her feet, she dropped the gloves and placing her tiny hands on Josephine's knees, said ingratiatingly, "Non-non not *very* naughty."

The words and the touch found the source of Josephine's tears. Her eyes filled, and catching up the child she hid her wet cheeks against the small body.

Martha, who had been standing watching the scene helplessly, at last interposed. "There's no time for fretting" she reminded her mistress. "We've got to start at ten o'clock to-morrow morning, and there's all the kid's clothes to buy. Mr. Murison said he couldn't be bothered with luggage, and you was to get what she wanted."

This last practical item acted as the bugle call to Josephine's energies. "Hasn't she anything but what she is wearing?" she inquired, with a disapproving glance through her tears at Mignon's soiled white frock.

"Not a rag," replied Martha, feeling the force of brevity in such an extreme situation.

Josephine gave the child a final hug, and rose to her feet.

"I must go out at once," she said, "or the shops will all be closed."

Martha grinned approval, then promptly carried Mignon off to give her some tea.

As soon as she was alone Josephine took Andrew's card from her pocket, and read: "*Sorry to have missed you, but came by an earlier train—couldn't wait. Shall run down and spend an hour or two with you on Sunday. Yours, A.*"

Her expression brightened as she read. The matter-of-fact nature of the message was somehow reassuring. It took so plainly for granted the stability of the understanding between them. Yes, she felt assured that Andrew and herself would always be close friends. The fact of such a tie being possible lifted him from that ignoble position where Erasmus's unspoken condemnation had placed him, and she asked herself if, in telling her story to Erasmus, she had unconsciously been betrayed into giving an unjust impression of Andrew.

CHAPTER XIV

TIME, on that August autumn Sunday afternoon, two days later, seemed to be standing idle. Not one fleck of cloud broke the hard brilliance of blue sky, against which the foliage of late summer darkened in clear-cut outline.

Josephine, holding little Mignon by the hand, was walking down the chalky white road bordered by fir trees which led to the railway station. Andrew had telegraphed the time of his arrival and the pair were on their way to meet the train. They trudged along in silence—Josephine absorbed in her own thoughts, and little Mignon with a sedateness which she had developed during her year's absence.

"When we have turned the corner by Chown's farm we may see him," Josephine thought. The road beyond that corner stretched in a straight line to the station.

The gables of the farm-house cut the dazzling blue of the sky, and sunflowers in the garden stared brazen faced over the sweetbriar hedge. Her breath came faster as they skirted the stable corner, and her eyes apprehensively raked the long road which lay white between the dusty grey hedges.

"There he is, Non-non!" she cried, and almost before the words had left her lips Mignon had

recognised the object of her adoration in the distance, and taken to her heels.

Josephine watched the little figure flying downhill, and the bigger one, who was leisurely ascending, take off his hat and wave to the child. The motionless aspect of nature all round made a stage-like background to the little scene, and he was signalling to herself now, gaily, and with an absence of self-consciousness she would have given a great deal to be able to emulate. Perhaps the constraint of her greeting was accountable for a shade of ceremony in his, and a sense of estrangement fell chill on her secret excitement.

"How d'you think the kid looks?" he asked.

"She's very thin."

"Yes, there's plenty of room for improvement," and his eyes were anxious as they observed his small daughter.

"We're going to see Mr. Dan," announced Mignon, breaking the silence which followed.

Josephine explained that Dan was a person who supplied their landlady with fruit and vegetables which he grew in a large garden belonging to an old uninhabited house; and that he had promised to pick Mignon an apple straight off the tree.

Andrew entered with zest into the expedition, and the three continued their way through the trance-like calm of the autumn day.

Mignon being now assured of her father's company for the rest of the afternoon, settled down into a sedate trot, and the other two were free to an interchange of talk.

Andrew listened to Josephine's explanation of her intention to stay in her present quarters for the next

three or four weeks, and expressed his satisfaction. "Look as if you want a rest," he added.

Her eyes dropped before a certain inquisitive expression in his, and he noticed the sign with disapproval. "I say," he began, "we're not going to play at being shy with each other, I hope. I've an odd sensation of having come back and found a stranger."

"What a coincidence! I had exactly the same sensation when I first met you."

"Well," he replied thoughtfully, "a year makes a difference, I suppose, especially *some* years."

She was quick to interpret all he left unsaid, and turned to him expectantly.

"I don't think I told you in my letters," he continued, "that it was old Mazzarelli who set me to work again?"

"You didn't write very often," she reminded him.

"I always was a bad correspondent."

"I'm not reproaching you. Go on with your story."

"Yes, it was Mazzarelli," he continued reminiscently. "I met one of the old students in Paris, Tuckman, the pianist—you may have heard me speak of him. Lost an arm in Belgium, poor chap. He wrote and told Mazzarelli he'd seen me, and the old chap dug me out and accused me of cheating him of the glory due to him for discovering me. There was a regular scene—he raved and wept and called me a coward and a fool. He wanted to know my plans, and when I told him I had none he looked so dangerous that I had to soothe him with a promise. You know the result. The old villain got his way, and I've been fiddling ever since."

"Dear old Mazzarelli! How I should love to see him again!"

"Perhaps you will," he answered. "Wouldn't you like to go back, some time?" He was looking at her tentatively.

"Yes," she replied hesitatingly, "it would be interesting."

"I am returning there for another year's work," he observed.

"I thought you had finished," and try as she would, she was unable to keep a note of disappointment out of her voice.

There was an added cheerfulness in his tones as he answered, "Has one ever finished?"

At this moment little Mignon withdrew her hand from Andrew's and ran eagerly ahead of them. They had entered a lane bordered on each side by high red brick walls, their colour softened by time to that indescribable hue where all colours meet. Behind the walls, and towering far above them, grew ancient elms and beeches. Here and there some outstanding branch had already been touched by the finger of autumn, but on this day of trance-like calm and golden sunshine, the warning of the yellowing leaves was unheeded.

Half-way down the lane the wall was broken by a small wooden door. It was open, and just inside it stood a man in his shirt-sleeves with a pipe between his teeth.

"Good afternoon, Dan," said Josephine.

The person addressed touched his cap. "Little miss come to see the termarters growin'?" he observed as he took the pipe out of his mouth to make room for a broad grin. They followed the

slouching figure down a narrow pathway bordered by high box hedges. The wide space of earth enclosed within the old, red-brick walls, where fruit and vegetables grew and ripened together, might have been the shrine of the goddess Pomona. Cabbages, vegetable marrows, currant bushes and apple trees flourished in peaceful contiguity. Dan, with the child at his heels, was at the further end of the path, and Josephine and Andrew were practically alone.

"Look!" she exclaimed. "A pagan sacrifice!"

A column of blue smoke, like incense, rose from a smouldering fire of dead leaves, and motionless before it stood Dan and little Mignon.

"But where's the deity?" he inquired. "The pagans were materialists and liked an embodiment of their gods."

"*I* can see one," she declared.

He looked again, and perceived through, and behind the blue smoke, a stone figure, armless and headless, standing on a weather-beaten pedestal.

"Looks as if Dan were given to some occult form of pagan superstition," he observed.

They turned and walked down a side path towards an old gateway set between brick pillars on top of which were two stone globes. The gate, half off its hinges, was ajar, and pushing it back, they entered a weed-grown courtyard, darkened by the high walls of some outbuildings. They picked their way over the cobblestones, and passed through another gateway into an open space of neglected lawn which stretched away from the back windows of an old house. The silent place seemed to hold all the hidden sadness of the autumn day, and they gazed

without speech at its desolation. There was a terrace running round the house and long French windows opening into empty rooms. Andrew, in a spirit of exploration, pushed at one of the windows, and to their surprise it yielded to his pressure. He entered with Josephine behind him, and together they stood looking round at various reproductions of themselves in plate-glass panels surrounded by white and gold mouldings.

She followed him upstairs to a gallery running crosswise from room to room, and he seized her hand playfully. "Come along and let's explore this cheerful-looking room to the right," he said.

CHAPTER XV

THE room which they entered was panelled with dark wood, and flooded with a warm haze of sunshine. She sat down on the broad window-seat, and watched certain investigations on the part of her companion with idle amusement. He had discovered various odd-shaped cupboards behind the dark panelling, and was exploring their recesses with boyish curiosity.

"Dash my wig," he exclaimed in muffled accents, with his head thrust into one of them, "if there isn't the queerest collection of articles here! A felt hat, a tin whistle, a pair of dumb-bells, and a bundle of legal documents——"

Josephine, who had been but listlessly amused, now suddenly began to remonstrate. "I really don't think we are justified in poking about like this," she said; "the house isn't open to the public, you know."

"You'll keep your scruples to yourself when you see what I've got," continued the muffled voice, and he emerged from the cupboard carrying a violin case in his hands.

She jumped up with a reflection of his excitement.

"Is there anything inside?"

"Feels like it, but perhaps," with a malicious

smile, "we hadn't better meddle with other people's property."

"It would serve you right if, instead of letting you open the case, I go and tell Dan what you are doing."

"Very well then—go!" he replied threateningly.

They were standing with their heads close together, all else forgotten but their professional interest in the little event.

"Not much of a find," he pronounced as he removed the instrument from its case.

"No—and two of the strings gone."

"Must have been here for months."

He began to screw up the two remaining strings, and drew the bow experimentally across them.

"You must hear my 'Guarnerius,'" he told her as he elicited a thin wail from the string.

"Yes, I want to."

He produced his pocket handkerchief, dusted the violin, and placing it under his chin began to juggle with it.

She resumed her seat, and pushing back the casement window, gazed across the stretch of neglected lawn to the belt of dark trees beyond.

Andrew was doing wonders with the two strings, amusing himself with the half idle condescension of a boy with some outgrown plaything. Andrew could have got music out of a sixpenny tin whistle. The violin was an inferior one, and had probably never been in hands more capable than those of a schoolgirl. But in response to the touch of the master it found a voice in which there were hints of a pensive charm.

As Josephine listened she was gazing down below at the terrace walk with its large stone vases full of long faded grass, and a fanciful idea came to her that the violin was voicing the secret of the old house—the secret of the commonplace dignified by adversity.

The house in its young days must have been prosaic enough, with its ostentatious decoration of white and gold, its plate glass panels, and stucco ornamentation. Perhaps, like some commonplace people, it had had a shamed consciousness of its poverty of interest. But adversity had come—the inmates had deserted it—time had dulled its white and gold magnificence, and dust had filmed its plate-glass panels. No fires had been lit on its hearths, save when some giddy party of picnickers might have invaded it—brief birds of passage, who had made youthful merriment within its desolate old walls—then had left it as thoughtlessly as they had entered—left it to short, wintry days and long, black nights, when, from one month to another, no footstep would wake its echoes. Only the wind wailing round it, and finding entrance through some unlatched window or ill-fitting casement, would flit with a rustle as of ghostly garments through its empty rooms and long corridors.

Presently Dan and little Mignon wandered into view. Dan carried a basket into which he was dropping mysterious articles apparently procured in various dives he kept making into a hedge which separated the lawn from the surrounding plantation, and so absorbed was Mignon in watching him that she did not appear to have missed her companions.

Josephine looked at the pair dreamily. The restrained pathos of Andrew's performance seemed

wrought into the exquisite calm of the afternoon, and the voice of the old house went on with its history, a history learnt in years of patient submission to Time's chastening hand, and in much meditation on the past when voices and footsteps made music in its rooms, and its walls witnessed the eternal human drama. . . .

A string snapped and the music ceased suddenly. Andrew replaced the violin in its case and came and seated himself beside her. "Well?" he queried with a smile.

She gave him an answering smile. "You made it talk," she told him.

"What did it say?"

She looked down to where Dan loitered with the child. "*You* ought to know," she declared.

He negatived the suggestion with a shrug of the shoulders, as his glance followed hers to the edge of the plantation where Dan loitered with Mignon.

"I'm afraid I've placed a great responsibility on your shoulders Josephine," he began. "I must engage a nurse for the kid."

"I've got Martha—she loves Mignon."

"Then let Martha have the job, and engage another maid in her place."

"That was my own idea," and they fell to discussing plans for the child's welfare.

"Your work musn't suffer," he said in conclusion.

"It won't—and, besides, work isn't everything."

He pondered the statement, then began again, "It's jolly well *got* to be—if you want to do anything big."

"Well—I *don't*. I seem to have lost all personal

ambition lately. I'm not cut out for public life and I earn enough by teaching to live quite comfortably."

His eyes were curious again, and she avoided them when he began, "What is it, Josephine? There's *something*, I swear."

"No—there's nothing."

"*Sure?*"

"Quite sure."

He received the statement doubtfully. "I thought perhaps——?" but she refused to help him out.

"But, of course, if you say there *isn't*," he persevered.

"I don't understand."

"I mean, anyone else—a lover, to put it baldly."

"Oh!" The slow colour mounted to her face. "It wouldn't have occurred to me you'd think *that*."

"It's a natural supposition."

"Well, there *isn't*."

"Then we can carry on where we left off," he said tentatively—"unless . . ." His eyes went to the child, then back again to herself.

"Yes, Andrew?" she said expectantly.

"Unless, Josephine—you'd marry me?" He got the words out with a jerk, and there was something almost shamefaced in his air.

She stared at him, doubting the evidence of her ears. "Marry you," she echoed stupidly.

"Yes, why not?" He seemed to gain courage as he spoke.

"Wouldn't it be more reasonable to ask why *should* I?" and the urgency of the question put him at a disadvantage.

"Well, there are several reasons," he began argumentatively.

"Tell me them," she demanded with a determination not to spare him, or herself.

He looked at her protestingly. "You *have* altered!" he repeated, and she softened under the appeal in his eyes.

"I know the reason you're thinking of," she said, "but it wouldn't weigh with me, Andrew—not one bit. Go on with the others."

"You've taken the wind out of my sails and made it difficult," he complained.

"No, no, I didn't mean to do that. I really *want* to hear," and she gave him an encouraging smile.

"I was thinking of the kid," he admitted.

"Yes, I suppose you were," she agreed, and wondered how the irony of the situation could have escaped him. But then he didn't know.

"You're fond of her," he went on painstakingly.

"I love her."

"And you don't dislike me?" His air said, "I'm a likeable chap; I don't have to go down on my knees to win a woman's favour."

She began to laugh—an odd laugh that suggested some tension of emotion at breaking point. "No, I don't dislike you," she agreed.

"Well——?" and he paused, throwing the onus of responsibility on her shoulders.

"I still don't see——"

"I'm not asking impossibilities," he continued, ignoring the interruption. "It's true we have nothing more to offer each other than friendship and good comradeship, but those two things go a good way to make happiness in married life."

She listened, wondering. "I never thought to hear *you* talk like that," she told him.

"Oh, well, I've sown my wild oats, you see," and he stared past her towards where Dan and the child loitered below.

"Yes," she answered, and there was a dreary note in her voice which seemed to express regret for the passing of youth's follies.

"And I want a *home*," he continued with determination.

"Ah!" she ejaculated in a noncommittal tone.

He waited patiently during the silence which followed, then he put his arm round her shoulders and made as if to draw her to him. "Couldn't you do it for Mignon's sake?" he pleaded.

"I can take care of *her* without marrying *you*." Her voice was obstinate, her body unyielding.

He removed his arm, and there was hurt vanity in his voice as he said curtly, "It's impossible."

"Anyhow, I can keep her until she gets stronger," she persisted.

"That may be a question of years."

"What do you mean?"

"That things are more serious than you suppose. The Dover doctor told me it was very improbable that she would ever grow to womanhood."

At his words Josephine experienced a stab of sharp physical pain, and her face paled. He saw it with compunction, and his mood changed suddenly. "I'm a selfish beast!" he declared. "It's the same old story. *You* are to give, and *I'm* to take."

"And do you think," she said, with an odd note of restrained passion in her voice, "that I object to giving?"

"No, I never think *that*, but I suppose I'm asking too much *this* time."

"You're giving what you can," she said wistfully. The question under the words should have been evident to the least discerning of men, but he did not hear it.

"Yes," he told her. "I'll share all I have with you and the kid."

"Oh, Andrew, it's too late!"

"'Too late!' You talk in riddles."

"Mignonette," she whispered.

"Ah!" he replied, like one who has been probed in a sensitive nerve. Then rallying himself, went on reprovingly, "But, my dear child, that's foolish. Digging up the past is a madman's game—*our* bit is with the present. I'm not thinking only of myself and Mignon. As my wife you would have companionship and ample means. Instead of that fatiguing teaching, you could devote your time to the developing of your own talent. You love the child, but you can't keep her for good unless you take me too. I have thought it all out during the last few months, and I felt it was a goal beyond which everything was clear sailing."

He spoke rapidly and eagerly as they descended the stairs of the old house, and she listened, conscious of lessening powers of resistance. "It seems such a risk," she objected, changing her ground. "Suppose you were to change your mind afterwards?"

They were crossing the lawn towards Dan and Mignon as she spoke, and her companion slackened his pace. "I've deserved that," he replied, with some bitterness, "but trust me and see."

"You mean that——"

"I told you I'd sown my wild oats. Work has come first for the last year. It will *always* be first now."

His tone of assurance, and a new determination which she discovered in him, was at once a source of happiness and renewed pain. In that defencelessness which accompanies the surrender of the heart she felt their positions were reversed. It was she who was the weak one now, and Andrew the strong. With the abandonment of friendship for love she had lost the moral strength of her old ascendancy. Henceforth she would be a pensioner on his bounty.

They were quite close to Dan and little Mignon now, but Dan was so busy looking for blackberries in the hedge on the outskirts of the plantation, and Mignon so absorbed in watching him, that neither was aware of the approach of the other two.

As they drew near they heard Mignon's childish treble ask:

"Mr. Dan, is your mother dead?"

"Yes, missy, she is," replied the person questioned cheerfully.

"Is she in the dirt, Mr. Dan?"

"Yes, in the churchyard, under the daisies," said Dan resignedly as he put the basket on the ground to leave both hands free to grapple with a tall, outstanding blackberry bramble.

"*What* a pity!"

As to how far this remark was a piece of childish conventionality on Mignon's part, or whether it indicated some personal knowledge of pain, must be an unsolved mystery. The speaker's little figure had a languid droop which gave pathetic accentuation to the words, and, having given the necessary meed

have to explain her to your friends. It would simplify matters considerably if you could, in a year's time, turn up with a husband who is Mignon's father by a first wife."

"I hate concocted tales. Why say anything at all?"

"Of course we need say nothing at all unless we are asked, but we must have some answer ready for curious people. They might otherwise think that Mignon—that you——"

"I hadn't thought of that," she replied slowly.

"And I feel a cad to have to remind you of it"

"If they did say it," she went on bitterly, "it would be only——"

"No, no, old lady," and he slipped his arm through hers. "I don't like hearing that note in your voice. I can't understand it either."

"Don't try, Andrew. I'm a perverse woman at times."

"And *I'm* a blundering man—but I'm not quite as forgetful of your point of view as I appear."

There was growing by the wayside a solitary flower of pale, pure tint, its lavender tone striking the note of colour in landscape and sky. She stooped down and picked the lonely blossom absently, then turning to him continued, "I'm glad you have said that."

He smiled, pulling his arm through hers again. "Is it settled, then?" he asked.

"Yes, Andrew," she answered, and they continued their way in harmony.

A sound of distant bells, which had accompanied them on their walk, now began to fill the air with wild music, and groups of people passed them, all moving in the direction of an ancient, square-towered

church, built of flint stones, and roofed with red tiles.

Josephine and Andrew stood for a few minutes watching the worshippers as they came out of the twilight and traversed the narrow pathway between the graves into the lighted building beyond.

After leaning against the wall for a few minutes, Andrew with a quick movement pulled himself upright. "Come along," he said, "I want you to hear something."

The church porch was wide and roomy, with stone seats on each side, sunk the depth of two steps from the churchyard. They entered, and standing on one side to allow the constant stream of worshippers to pass, stood waiting.

"Listen," said Andrew, pulling her close up to the inner doorway leading into the church.

She strained her ears, but all she could hear was the wild clangour of bells, high up in the grey evening above. Helter-skelter they rang through all their varying changes, now with mad and seemingly inconsequent irregularity, and now chiming down the octave with magnificent precision, their sweetness intensified by a slight departure from "tune"—like the first quaver of age in some glorious voice.

Andrew appeared to have forgotten her presence, so absorbed was he in listening, but at last he turned to her saying, "Can you hear it?"

She stepped a little closer to the door, and, as she did so, there came to her through the wild sweetness of the chimes above and outside, a strange, weird moaning from below—a dreary, inarticulate cry which, as she listened, became the expression of her own heartache. To her imaginative mood, it seemed

typical of the duality of some lives. Outside, the wild music, the apparent joy and freedom; inside, the dreary, monotonous moaning, the impotent sadness and imprisonment in self.

He looked at her inquiringly. Then, with a brief "Come away," took hold of her hand and led her through the darkening churchyard.

When they were once more outside in the quiet country road, he began, "I've heard the same thing often before, and to-night it suddenly occurred to me that I might get an idea from it for a 'Reverie' I'm writing just now."

"It's too sad," she declared.

"The sadder the better," he said cheerfully.

"Yes, I suppose that's the artist's way of looking at it, and it rather spoils art—for *me*."

"*You* ought not to talk like that."

"I? Oh, but I'm more of a woman than an artist."

"A happier fate."

"Ah! you say that, but you wouldn't think it—for yourself. Your music is more to you than anything else in the whole world."

"Yes," he admitted, "the music comes first, Josephine. There's something about you which compels me to be truthful."

"I like you to be truthful, but oh, Andrew! you won't let the music take *all* your heart . . . You'll keep a little place for the child and for me. . . ." The passion in her voice took him by surprise and he could feel the trembling of her body against his arm.

"God bless me, of course I will," he answered in a cheerful, matter-of-fact tone. Then, with sudden

seriousness, "I wish I could escape the tyranny of art, Josephine. I'm *afraid* of it."

"Then you *don't* want it to absorb you entirely?"

"I want to be a power in the musical world and I know it's possible. It would be absurd to affect modesty with you. But I hate being the slave of this thing to which no emotion in life is sacred."

"Yes, I understand," she said, "but think of the pleasure you can give to others."

"But I *don't* think of it."

"Art for art's sake alone?"

"Yes, that's it. The true artist must always be more or less of a monster. He barters realities for shams—like a man who gives up a piece of bread for the picture of a loaf."

"Do you mean to say that the expression of emotion lessens its reality?"

"I do," he answered. "It's the price one has to pay for the possession of the artistic faculty."

"It seems to me," she observed sadly, "that no matter how beautiful the thing, there is a tragedy at its heart when one pulls it to pieces."

"Yes, but fortunately the majority of people don't pull things to pieces."

"When did you begin to do so, Andrew?"

"From the day I made the discovery that the best way to get rid of a real grief is to act a sham one."

She shook her head. "I don't believe in your cynicism," she told him.

"No, I suppose you wouldn't. You're an incurable optimist."

As if in support of this statement, she went on, "And perhaps things will be more cheerful for you, when you have Mignon—and me."

CHAPTER XVII

IN the Green Park the yellow leaves were flying high before drifting to earth, and the embers of a sullen sunset smouldered behind the dramatic setting of the Victoria Memorial. It would be Josephine's last walk there, for a year—and who knows what a year may bring forth. To-morrow would be her wedding day, and after the ceremony she and Andrew, accompanied by Mignon and Martha, were to start for Paris.

She had come out into the October twilight, wishing to be alone, but a chance meeting with Barbara Langton had intervened, and after standing for a few minutes talking, the two turned, driven onwards by the riotous wind.

"It's *weeks* since I have seen you," began Barbara reproachfully.

"I've been away for a month, and am off again to-morrow." Josephine took the plunge which was to lead up to the making of an awkward announcement. She had intended doing so by letter and the meeting was rather inopportune.

"I should have thought you would have returned to settle down for the winter," and Barbara's air was slightly disapproving.

"I'm going to settle down. I'm to be married to-morrow."

"Going to be married—to-morrow!" Miss Langton stopped short in the middle of the path—an act made difficult by the force of the gale which had been driving her before its sweeping onrush.

"Yes, it seems rather a breathless sort of performance, I'm afraid, but Andrew Murison is an old friend. I knew him when I was a student in Vienna. We are spending the next year in Paris."

"Does Erasmus know?" asked Miss Langton.

"I haven't told him. You are the first friend to whom I've mentioned it."

"Ah!" and the listener appeared to be considering the statement in connection with some unspoken reflection. "I thought perhaps——" she began, then stopped short.

The wind dropped momentarily and the two walked on in silence. "Then you probably aren't aware that Erasmus has gone to Malta?" continued Barbara.

"No, it's more than a month since I last saw him and I've heard nothing."

"He's going to get local colour for this new novel he's writing. At least that's what he *says*," Miss Langton turned on her companion almost angrily.

"Oh, Josephine, what have you done to Erasmus? What are you going to do to yourself? It's no use your looking at me like that. I *will* speak out."

"I don't mind your speaking out, Barbara," answered Josephine humbly. "Has Erasmus told you——?"

"He has told me nothing, but I've watched him, and *I know*."

"I never guessed until——. If I could have

prevented it, I would. As for myself—I'm going to marry the man I love."

"' You are going to marry the man you love, and you talk to me about it with *that* look on your face. God help you, Josephine!"

"Oh, Barbara, *don't*! and this the eve of my wedding day."

But the listener preserved her air of protest. "After all," she remarked argumentatively, "what better wish could I offer."

"It sounds as if you thought—as if, and it isn't——" Josephine was incoherent in her anxiety to remove the impression she had unconsciously created. "You couldn't help liking Andrew if you knew him, and his little daughter is a darling," she persevered.

"A child! He's a widower, then?"

"Yes." Josephine was surprised at the ease with which she lied. Whatever else Barbara might suspect she could have no grounds for doubting this statement.

"Ah, well, Josephine, I suppose you know your own business best. Forgive me if I have seemed officious. I am old enough to be your mother you know, and I'd always hoped—but it was not to be."

Josephine said nothing, breaking the silence presently to inquire whether Erasmus had "gone for long?"

"For the winter, I believe," answered Barbara, "and you——?"

"Mr. Murison is studying in Paris. He won't return to London until he has finished his course. His three years in France made a serious break, and, after, he lost interest for a time."

"Ah, a fellow artist?"

"Yes, some day he will take London by storm." Josephine's pride in her lover's genius shone in her eyes.

"I used to think it was *you* who were going to take London by storm!"

Josephine shook her head. "I've sunk my ambition in his."

"Well, perhaps you are wise. You don't want to be your husband's rival."

"There's no possibility of that." Then, impulsively, "Wish me well, Barbara, and I'll take it as a good omen."

"I don't believe in 'omens,'" said Barbara grimly. "I came out this afternoon feeling that something nice was going to happen."

"And now you're being 'nasty,' to me!"

"I never set up for being a saint, Josephine."

"Don't be catty, Barbara. It's good-bye—for a year."

Barbara's hand tightened its hold of Josephine's. "If *only* it had been Erasmus—" she said, then, with a suddenness which bespoke the loss of her self-control, she wrenched her hand free and was gone.

Andrew's arrival was evidenced by the aromatic scent of his cigar when Josephine entered her flat ten minutes later. The drawing-room was lit only by a flicker of firelight, and two figures, their heads close together, were seated by the hearth. Andrew was in an arm-chair, with little Mignon on his knee, and the two were absorbed in something he was doing with a pencil and scrap of paper.

Josephine advanced quietly and glanced over Andrew's shoulder. He was engaged on a pencil

sketch of " the cat who walked alone," and was just putting in the finishing touches when Mignon, with a sudden impish impulse to mischief, made a grab at the piece of paper. " No, no, don't, Non-Non," he said, seizing the naughty little hand in preoccupied fashion, while he continued to work up the sketch.

Meanwhile the child had become aware of another presence in the room, and turning her head discovered Josephine. Andrew put out his hand to draw the new-comer into sight. " Where have you been ? " he asked. " I've been waiting here an hour and a half."

" I had some shopping to do," she explained as she dropped into a low chair near the other two. " It's Mignon's bed time, and are you going to stay to dinner, Andrew ? "

His expression became reproachful. " You've broken the spell," he complained, " and you ask me to dinner with an air of—' I shall have to send out for another chop if he says yes.' "

" Well, I shall, but Martha wouldn't mind going. She'd do anything for *you*."

" Martha's a sport. I'll let her get that chop."

As he spoke Martha herself came to carry Mignon off to bed, and after she had gone Josephine and Andrew lapsed into silence, he staring into the fire, she leaning back in her chair with closed eyes. " Do you ever feel like a ghost, Andrew ? " she began at last.

He gave an odd laugh. " Is one ever anything else ? " he asked.

" Ah, then you know the sensation of being hurried through a succession of events like an automaton, and never allowed to pause to realise oneself, except

perhaps in some awful flash when you wake suddenly in the night."

"Yes, the moment when you realise the impossibility of escaping from yourself *is* rather disconcerting, and the man who commits suicide may find the problem still facing him on the other side, but can't we find a more cheerful subject for discussion, *to-night*, old girl?"

"Do you *feel* cheerful, Andrew? Are you *really* happy?"

"I'm content, which is much better." He continued to stare thoughtfully into the fire. "I've been thinking of Mignonette to-day," he went on, speaking slowly and reluctantly.

"Yes, Andrew, I've thought of her, too."

He waited for a moment or two, still struggling with the difficulty of expression, then he said, "I've never told you how I left her, have I?"

"No; tell me now," and there was a reflection of his own reluctance in her manner.

"It was brought about by one of those diabolical opportunities which always seem to wait on selfish inclinations," he began.

She made no answer, and he went on: "I had known her about six months, and was beginning to tire of her. There was not enough of the coquette in her to keep me. From the first moment of our intimacy she had been as easily read as a child. If I happened to be a quarter of an hour late at the place of our meetings I would find her eyes full of tears and her face pale with the expectancy of her disappointment. I'd go behind her unnoticed, that my vanity might be fed by seeing the sudden joy in her face when she turned and discovered me——" He paused for a

moment, then continued: "I remember one night I had been unavoidably detained until it was too late to go at all. At least I thought so, and called a taxi to take me elsewhere. It passed the place of our rendezvous, two hours after the time appointed for it. I glanced casually out of the window, and, my God, Josephine, she was there!—still waiting, in a bitter north east wind, and with only a thin coat on her shoulders——" He stopped again, taking a deep breath, then went on: "I got out of the cab and took her back into it with me. She was blue with the cold and shaking from head to foot. I chafed her poor little hands; I believe I shed tears over them. It was that damned tenderness which led to all the mischief. I took her home to my rooms——"

There was a long pause. The pungent scent of some chrysanthemums filled the room with their herb-like odour, and Josephine could distinctly hear the ticking of Andrew's watch.

Martha entered the room carrying a letter. Andrew waited for her exit, then turning to Josephine, continued, "And that was the beginning of the end of it all."

"Yes," she replied drearily, "I suppose it was."

"But wait," he continued, "I have told you how I was summoned to my mother's death bed and how my leave was stopped the day she died. Well, I promised myself I'd write in the train, but as London was left farther and farther behind I began to think. The trouble about my mother sobered me and dwarfed other matters. I began to look at my relations with Mignonette from a different standpoint. This shock which had come to me had shown me how very small a part she played in my life. I was getting tired of

her, and knew I should not be able to conceal the fact much longer——"

"Poor Mignonette!" There was a note of personal pain in Josephine's involuntary exclamation.

"There was a cousin of hers," he went on, "a young farmer, who was then in town. He wanted her to be engaged to him, and I knew that I alone was the obstacle in his way. It occurred to me that if I refrained from writing and never saw her again she might marry the cousin and forget me——". He paused again and Josephine interrupted:

"You thought *that* after having witnessed her devotion to you!"

"How was I to know," he answered bitterly, "that she was that one-idead and most pathetic of all creatures—a faithful woman!"

"You ought to have known—you ought to have seen!"

"Yes, I ought to have known; don't think I am making excuses for myself, and let me finish what I have to say."

She made a gesture of assent, and he continued: "There was one satisfaction she had always denied me—she would never accept money from me, or any but the most trifling presents. I shall never forget her face when for the first, and last, time I offered her money. She didn't say 'What for?' but her eyes asked the question with such an agonised misgiving in their depths that I never rested until I had lied her into reassurance——" He waited a moment as if expecting some interruption on the part of his companion, but none being forthcoming, continued: "This refusal of Mignonette's to take money from me made the task of leaving her a difficult matter.

If only I could have given her an allowance that would have ensured her from want in the case of ill-health or no work! but I dared not.

"I used to lie awake at night during that week following my mother's death thinking of, then rejecting, first one plan, then another which suggested itself as a solution to the difficulty——"

"Oh, Andrew," Josephine broke in, "why didn't you write and tell her truthfully that you had ceased to care for her? What is the money question in comparison to her suspense? While you were racking your brains for some means of conferring on her some of your easily-got money, she was breaking her heart for a word or sign from you."

"I hadn't the courage to write that brutal letter," he answered lamely, "and I hadn't the courage to face her reproaches. I knew that if she wrote to me I should probably be betrayed into sending a tender answer, which would unsettle her again. Better, I thought, to keep silence."

Josephine looked into the fire hopelessly. "I cannot understand," she said. "Perhaps it is the difference between the man's and the woman's point of view."

Neither spoke again for a few minutes, then Josephine asked, "Is that all?"

"No, not quite. As the result of my sleepless nights I devised a plan. There was a woman in the house where Mignonette lodged who had a good, honest face, and I decided to make her my ambassador.

"I wrote to her, enclosing a cheque for fifty pounds, telling her that I trusted her to use it for her lodger, should she be ill or in want, without betraying the

fact that it came from outside. I gave an address at a post office, and said if more were required it would be sent on application. It was a desperate venture; I knew I was inviting fraud, but there seemed no other way, and I staked all on my powers of observation. They didn't play me false; the woman was trustworthy——"

"Ah!" interrupted Josephine again, "I know. It was the Mrs. Best of whom Mignonette used to speak so gratefully. She told me that, but for her landlady, Mignon would have been born in the workhouse."

"Yes," continued Andrew huskily, "Mignonette told me all about it, and how the poor thing herself died three months later when her own baby was born. That explained the fact of my hearing no more of her. If she had lived Mignonette would never have suffered as she did, and I should have found her sooner."

"Andrew," asked Josephine suddenly, "how was it that you came to love her, really, afterwards?"

He looked at his companion thoughtfully. "It came gradually," he replied, "during those months I spent in the trenches. I was horribly lonely, and used to think of England and her with a kind of homesickness. Once I was in hospital for three weeks, nothing serious, only a sort of malaria. I must have been delirious, because I used to think she came and laid her cool cheek against my burning one. During the days of my convalescence the thought of writing to her began to take the shape of a temptation."

"Why 'a temptation'?" asked Josephine, abruptly.

"Because I still had no wish to marry her, and I

had come to realise the abominable injustice of our old relations."

"Why did you not wish to marry her?" inquired his companion, with the insistence of one who seeks to probe the heart of some mystery.

"Because reason—self, perhaps, is the truer word—argued that unequal marriages are a risk—that I should probably tire of her again—that she would tire of me when disillusionment following on marriage intervened."

"But that was only a stage in your reasoning," persisted Josephine. "Later, when you came back to England to find her, you were sure enough of yourself to wish to make her your wife."

"Yes, love had triumphed, but reason had not been silenced for all that."

Josephine sat for a long while in strained thought, then she began again, "Had you given up *all* hope of finding her when you took me to the seaside that day?"

"I had given up all hope before meeting you that first night in London. I was in the mood then to go to the devil altogether. You became my friend and saved me. I'll try to make you a decent husband, Josephine. We're not starting with any impossible illusions. Our happiness will be made of good substantial stuff which will stand some wear and tear."

"Yes, we aren't aiming too high," she answered with a touch of cynicism, and she rose with a preoccupied air.

"You are not going to change?"

"Only my blouse."

"Want any help?"

"No," and for a moment she looked as self-

conscious as a schoolgirl. Something in the tone of his voice kindled certain fears which she had been telling herself were gratuitous, and as she changed her blouse in the next room she accused herself of cowardice, in not having had an understanding with Andrew on one point. There was to be no reopening of past relations unless he would love her as a wife should be loved, and perhaps she ought to have made this quite clear. Why hadn't she? There were reasons, but perhaps the one which influenced her most was the reflection that she might be premature in refusing something he had no intention of offering.

CHAPTER XVIII

JOSEPHINE raised herself on her elbow and looked at the array of corded boxes, and the dark blue travelling dress which Martha had spread out carefully on two chairs. The room was cheerless in the cold morning light. After Andrew's departure on the previous evening she had packed away all the little personal belongings which had given it its home-like air. In the grate were the ashes of last night's fire, and on the furniture the dust of yesterday.

Yesterday and to-day! The past hours and days and weeks had come and gone unobtrusively, and this day had dawned just like any of the rest. "Last night" had seemed years removed from it. The period of coming darkness between had been a slender bridge spanning a gulf of infinite possibilities, but the bridge had been crossed, and *to-day* had come!

They had decided to break their journey to Paris by spending the night at Dover, and arrived at their hotel in a downpour of rain. But it cleared towards the late afternoon, and Andrew had taken Mignon to say good-bye to her aunt. The child had returned tired and fretful, and Martha had put her straightway to bed.

The bride and bridegroom had dined in the private

room Andrew had engaged, and he had gone out afterwards to send a wire to his lawyer about some business he had overlooked in the hurry of departure from London.

Josephine sat listening to the booming of the waves as they thundered shorewards, and the ticking of the marble clock on the mantelpiece. Presently Andrew would return, and when he did she had something to say to him. She rose, and pulling back the curtain, looked into the wild night. There was a moon at intervals between the scudding clouds, and as she watched, a pale light flickered its response on the heaving surface of the black waters. Down below, pedestrians who had braved the gale were making staggering journeys along the front, and out at sea the position of a lightship was evidenced by a lonely green star set in a tenebrous desolation.

She dropped the curtain, and crossing the room restlessly, opened the door and listened. A little farther down the corridor was the room where the child slept. Martha was there now, and it had occurred to Josephine that Martha was probably feeling dull. Perhaps she would like to go out for an hour to the " pictures."

Josephine's feet fell noiselessly on the carpeted floor as she went, and, opening a door, she entered a large room where a fire burned brightly on the hearth, and two leather suit cases stood at the foot of the big bed. One of the cases was open, and Martha had apparently been diving into its contents. A white satin nightdress case lay on the bed, and beside it a rose-coloured silk kimono. Josephine stood looking at these articles, a worried dent between her

brows, whilst the word "officious" formed itself in her mind in connection with the well-meaning Martha. This she knew was inconsistent. Martha naturally thought—anyone would have thought. Andrew evidently had when he ordered the room. It was all her own fault for not having had an understanding before. Perhaps the hidden ache of her heart inclined her to a summing-up of the case neither fair to him or flattering to herself, but to put it baldly, Andrew had married her that he might have the companionship of the child and, at the same time, be enabled to pursue his musical studies unhindered. There had been no mention of the word "love" between them. He had asked for nothing and offered nothing. He could not blame her if she took it for granted that relations between them were to be confined to companionship. She stood looking round the hotel bedroom, with its brass bedstead, and its white enamelled bedroom suite. Her outdoor things which she had left there had disappeared. Martha must have put them in the wardrobe. She wished it had been possible to leave Martha at home on this journey—but the girl was indispensable on the child's account.

She could hear a voice now, talking to Mignon in the little room which opened out of the big bedroom. Mignon apparently was restless, and the monotonous inflections of Martha's voice suggested that she was reading the child to sleep.

Josephine crossed the room, and opening a door, peeped through the aperature at the two. Martha was rendering the story of Brer Rabbit in a sing-song voice, and Mignon lay making an obstinate fight against the insidious approach of unconsciousness.

"And Brer Rabbit," related Martha, her glance travelling wanderingly towards the door, "he cotch 'im by de behime legs, en slung 'im right in de middle of . . ."

"Wasn't Brer Rabbit," contradicted Mignon, raising her eyelids the hundredth part of an inch. "You said that before. It's Brer Fox——"

Martha signalled caution to her mistress, and Josephine stole into the room, and stood waiting until the child's heavy lids dropped, and her dark lashes lay light as a feather on her rounded cheek. Martha at this point dropped "Brer Rabbit" and whispered "She's orf."

Josephine nodded, and the two women stood watching the sleeper for a moment or two, then Josephine said: "If you'd like to go out for an hour or two you can, Martha."

"There's nowhere to go, miss—I mean 'mam,'" and Martha betrayed an inclination to giggle.

"There's the 'pictures,'" suggested her mistress.

Martha considered the proposition. "You're sure you don't want me?"

"Quite sure. Go and enjoy yourself. It's dull sitting in your room alone."

"Well, it is," admitted Martha, "and I see they got 'A Wife's Repentance' as we come along in the taxi. Sounds as if it'd be good."

"All right, run along. I'll attend to Mignon if she wakes."

Martha went, and Josephine promptly began to remove her belongings from the next room. The bed on which the child was sleeping was big enough

to hold two, and Josephine had decided to be Mignon's bedfellow that night.

Her arrangements completed, she took a packet of cigarettes and a novel from her suit case, and returned to the sitting-room to await Andrew's reappearance.

The novel lay unopened in her lap, and when the sound of the ascending lift broke the quiet, she threw her half-smoked cigarette into the fire.

He came in bringing with him the scent of the ozone-swept streets. "It's going to be a rough night," he predicted. "If the wind hasn't dropped by to-morrow we'll postpone the crossing for another day."

"I think we'd better."

"Kid gone to sleep?" he inquired as he dropped into an arm-chair opposite and stretched his feet out to the fire.

"Yes, under protest. Martha had to resort to Brer Rabbit."

He chuckled. "Queer how she loves that thing!"

He lit a cigarette and sat smoking and staring into the fire. She wondered whether he was thinking of Mignonette's grave—somewhere out in the storm-driven night. The place must be one of harrowing associations for him. Nothing but consideration for the child would keep him there an hour longer than was necessary, she imagined.

"What's that?" He sat bolt upright in his chair in an attitude of strained listening.

"It's the sea; I've heard it all the evening."

He gave a queer, relieved laugh. "I thought it was guns. I often fancy I hear them, a legacy of nerves from France."

He threw away the cigarette end and, putting his hand into his pocket, missed his pipe. "Must have left it in the other coat," he said, and getting lazily out of his chair, he moved to the door.

The other coat to which he referred was in the bedroom, and she watched him go apprehensively.

She heard his tramp along the corridor, the click of an opening door, then silence. She pictured him switching on the light—his coat was hanging over the bed rail, she remembered. He would no doubt look into the adjoining room to see if Mignon was all right.

He was gone a long while. Ah! now he was coming.

There was the click of the door again, the pad of his footsteps down the carpeted corridor.

She did not turn her head when he entered, and there was something guilty in her attitude when he crossed over to the hearth and began abruptly: "Martha has moved your things?"

"No, Andrew. I moved them myself."

He stood looking down at her; she could feel his eyes through the back of her head. "Why?" His voice was non-committal, and she had not the courage to seek to read his face.

"I didn't know you expected—I thought you understood——" she stopped short waiting for him to help her out.

"So it isn't an eleventh-hour decision?"

"No, Andrew. I suppose we ought to have had it out—before—but you see there has never been any talk between us of—of anything but just the good comradeship——"

"Hasn't there?"

"You *know* there hasn't."

"It hadn't occurred to me to analyse the situation."

"That's just it, Andrew, you do things blindfold."

"Such as running into lamp-posts and getting a black eye."

The sarcasm in his voice was not lost on her, but all she could do was to repeat remorsefully, "I ought to have told you this before."

He was silent for a moment or two, during which time she felt he was making an effort at self-control, then he began again with assumed lightness, "Oh well, we won't argue the point, only there's one thing I *should* like to know, Josephine." He paused, then went on slowly, "I should like to know *why* you married me."

"I might reasonably ask why *you* married *me*," she retorted, "but there's no need. You wanted a home for the child, and a friend for yourself. Well, I married you to give you those things."

He pondered the statement. "Might seem to some people an inadequate reason," he suggested.

"It wasn't—to *me*."

He seated himself, and filled his pipe. "D'you mind?" he asked as he struck a match.

"No, I like it." She produced some knitting from a corner of her big chair, and the click of her needles made accompaniment to the ticking of the clock. Her hands weren't quite steady, the few sentences had covered so much that was left unsaid, and she was speculating uneasily as to what was going on in his thoughts. It was cowardly of her not to have

made things clear to him before their marriage. She had fought him with his own weapons, and it wasn't in human nature not to resent such treatment.

She sent a stealthy glance in his direction. He was staring intently into the fire as if trying to find there the solution to the conundrum with which she had provided him.

She dropped a stitch, and sought with bungling fingers to pick it up. His eyes were upon her now, she knew it without looking up. She heard him place his pipe on the mantelpiece, then a hand was stretched out, and the knitting taken from her grasp. She watched him pick up the stitch, and as he returned the work he said: "You're making a hash of that jumper."

"I am," she admitted humbly. "I never was good at needlework."

"Then why do it?"

"I don't know. Perhaps because all the other women do it."

"What a rotten, silly reason!"

Was the talk to end thus? she wondered. Had she hopelessly offended him? Was he hurt? Of what was he thinking as he sat, his pipe forgotten, staring into the fire.

He got up and looked towards the door. "I'm going for a walk," he announced.

She rose and faced him. "Don't be cross with me, Andrew," she implored.

"I'm not cross, only you see I've got to readjust my point of view. I wasn't prepared for this."

"It's all my fault. I'm so sorry. I've made a great mistake. I see it now. You are wishing you could undo this morning's work."

"I'm not wishing anything of the sort, Josephine."

"And if I'd told you before?"

"It would have made no difference. You summed up the situation correctly when you said I had married you because I wanted a home for the child and a friend for myself."

They were her own words given back to her, but she had not realised their power to wound when she used them. It was a terrible thing so to be at the mercy of a fellow creature. Since she had learned to love Andrew she was no longer mistress of her emotions. She foresaw that she might become unreasonable and exacting. She had voluntarily chosen a path beset with pitfalls, and the very first difficulty found her defenceless against his unconscious thrusts. "And yet you thought——" she began.

"I don't know that I thought anything. I'm not given to turning things inside out. However, you've set me going now," and his voice was a little grim. "Don't wait up for me," he continued. "I may be gone a long while."

"It's pouring with rain," she remonstrated, "and the wind's awful."

"I've got my mackintosh, and the wind will blow away the cobwebs." He knocked the ashes out of his pipe and put his hand on her shoulder. "Good night, Josephine," he said kindly, and touched her cheek lightly with his lips. "I hope you'll sleep well."

He was gone, and she dropped into her chair and mechanically picked up her knitting. She had got her own way, but the encounter had left her with a

new heartache, and a wretched uncertainty as to whether she had done right. His reasonableness was a thing in his favour, but she knew it was based on the fact that he didn't love her, a fact that confirmed her in the resolve not to make the surrender.

She sat over the fire listening to the booming of the sea and the sound of the rain beating against the windows, until Martha came in with the news that she had lost her footing and nearly been blown into the sea on her way home.

The girl stayed a few minutes to discuss her adventures, then, as her mistress did not require her services, announced her intention of going to bed.

Eleven o'clock struck and Andrew had not returned. Josephine could not stay up longer without giving the impression that she had waited for him, and this, under the circumstances, was not advisable.

And so she betook herself to the room where Mignon lay, glad, in the dreariness of her spirit, of the companionship of the sleeping child. Lying close to the softly breathing form in the small bed Josephine listened anxiously for sounds of Andrew's return. The minutes passed, and she began to have haunting fears. Suppose he never came back? Suppose something had happened to him? And she had sent him away!

Twelve o'clock struck, and she got up and looked out of the window. The rain had ceased, and the moon was racing the scudding clouds. What a strange wedding night! What was that? Some one was moving about in the next room. Thank God, he had come back! She crept cautiously into bed

again and lay listening. She heard him place his boots outside the door, and the padding of his feet on the carpet. Then the creak of the bed, and silence. There was, to her, something final in the sound, and she turned her face against the pillow, and wept.

CHAPTER XIX

IT was the end of October again—a year since Josephine's wedding day. The interval had been spent in Paris with her husband and Mignon, but they were now returned to London, intending to make it their headquarters for the future. They had taken a flat in Berkeley Square, and Josephine sat at a window commanding a rather dreary prospect of dank grass and leafless trees. In vistas between the tree trunks was a mist of fog-like promise, and she noticed it with forebodings for the child.

During the stay in Paris little Mignon lived the life of a tolerably healthy child. She complained too frequently of feeling tired, and was thin to the verge of attenuation, but her high spirits never flagged, and her nervous vitality was such that both Andrew's and Josephine's fears were lulled to rest. But this morning the latter's misgivings had been quickened into sickening terror by a discovery she had made. Martha had brought to her a scrap of a handkerchief on which there were blood stains.

Josephine had at once gone in search of the child and questioned her. "Did your nose bleed, darling?" she asked. "No, I coughed," answered Mignon, and Josephine, as she listened, fancied she detected in the little face a startling change.

Now, as she sat gazing into the growing twilight, her mind was busy with fearful conjectures. Mignon must not be allowed to face the London fogs. She herself must take her away at once, either to the south of England, or abroad. Andrew would not be able to accompany them, he having a multitude of engagements to fulfil in town. Andrew's star had risen, but he wore his honours well, neither being unduly elated nor unduly indifferent to the adulation he received. His music was the motive power in his life, and the appreciation of it by others merely an accident.

But was it the motive power in his life? Josephine paused on this question, whilst she mentally reviewed scenes that answered that question in the negative. She saw him with Mignon in his arms when the latter, in some excitable mood, had been sleepless and refused to rest anywhere else. She remembered those occasions when he had come to her own room in the middle of the night with an anxious question, "Did you hear that?" "Hear what?" "I thought I heard Mignon crying or calling," and how, to satisfy him, she had slipped on her dressing-gown, and peeped in at the door of the room where Martha and the child slept at the end of the corridor. She remembered, too, the way he would watch for Mignon's return after a few hours' absence, and the gleam in his eyes once, when, after the separation of a week, she had taken her to meet him at the station.

No! the music was *not* first. And at the thought an indescribable emotion of triumph mingled with pain thrilled her. She did not want the music to be first, but she was jealous of the child. She leaned

her forehead against the window-pane, gazing forlornly into the October afternoon The square was deserted, left to the rising mists and gathering twilight. It was like her life she thought, lonely in the sight of home. Mignon made that home for which Andrew had craved; she herself was an outsider.

Of course it was her own fault. How could she, as a wife in name only, expect anything else? If she could have foreseen, when she assumed that rôle, the secret heartaches, the intolerable strain of acting up to the part she had chosen, the hidden jealousies, the unreasonable resentment that Andrew had accepted so tamely the place she had assigned him. If she could have foreseen all this, she told herself, she would not have married him. She knew now, that the reason she had given for doing so had not been the true one, but that deep down in her heart had been the hope that, with the opportunities afforded by constant companionship, she could win his love. That hope had been killed by the matter-of-fact way in which, after the first shock of her refusal, he had settled down to take her at her word. She had watched him narrowly, and she knew that his air of content was not assumed. He had thrown himself heart and soul into his work, and Mignon had filled his hours of recreation. It was true that their interests in the child had been identical, and outwardly, things had gone smoothly and happily. But there were moments when she felt at breaking point. Moments when, but for Mignon's sake, she would have cut the knot and fled.

It was not that Andrew wasn't kind. He showered

upon her material benefits which caused her the keenest pain of her life, because she thought she detected in them the desire to atone—the attempt to patch by such means the threadbare garment of their union.

The life of ease and comparative idleness which she now led left her a prey to these and other torturing thoughts, and she was unable to fight the sullen current which carried her along. Her sole efforts at self-control were made in the presence of her husband, but to-day, the anxiety about Mignon had diverted her thoughts temporarily from herself. There was an element of relief in the prospect of a few months, with the child, away from Andrew. His presence was the constant rubbing of the sore. She might not be able to bear it much longer. Her indulgence in secret grief was undermining her powers of self-control, and some day she might betray herself.

Andrew must be told the bad news about Mignon, and she sickened with dread at the thought. How would he bear it, and how would he face the prospect of the inevitable separation for the winter? She would not tell him to-day. He was to play at Queen's Hall this evening, and it would not be advisable to tell him just before he started; to-morrow morning would be soon enough.

The afternoon post had just arrived, and a pile of unopened letters lay on the writing table. She rose and turned them over idly; there was only one for herself, and that was a dressmaker's bill. Andrew had always more than the lion's share of the correspondence. As she placed his letters in a neat pile,

the handwriting on one of them attracted her attention. The curving flourishes had an un-English look, and as she picked up the envelope she was conscious of an Oriental scent which she disliked. It occurred to her that she had seen such letters before in Paris. She remembered having noticed the London postmark, and she thought she would ask Andrew who his correspondent was. Some musical celebrity most likely. It might be Madame Delande, the pianist of whom she had often heard Andrew speak. She thought she would like to meet the pianist who was about to retire on her laurels at the age of sixty.

The door opened and Andrew came in with cheerful hurry. "I say!" he began, "I hope you remembered to order dinner half an hour earlier?"

"I did."

"Good!" He crossed to the writing-table and scanned the pile of letters, holding in his hand meanwhile the foreign-looking one which had lain on top. She was just going to ask him about it, when the words were arrested on her lips by something odd in his manner as he slipped it, unread, into his pocket.

Why had he done that? So preoccupied was she with trying to find an answer that when he tossed a sheaf of press cuttings into her lap she could do no more than make a pretence at reading them.

He came and stood behind her, gazing down into the deserted square. "Guess what I've been doing this afternoon," he began.

"Can't," she answered absently.

"I've run the gauntlet in the 'frocks' department at Swan and Edgar's, and that wants some doing."

"Oh, Andrew! I do hope you haven't been buying me any more clothes. I can't possibly wear all I've got now."

He looked quenched. "A woman who can't be pleased with a new dress she doesn't want isn't human," he grumbled. "And besides, this is a special occasion. Have you forgotten what to-morrow is?"

At his words her heart gave a sudden bound, and a pleased smile illumined her face. "No, I hadn't forgotten," she said, "but I thought *you* had."

"Come here," he adjured, "and do penance for having misjudged me."

She went and seated herself on the arm of his chair, but in a mood of high spirits he pulled her down beside him and began to ruffle her hair, just as she had often seen him play with the child. "Now guess what I have bought you," he said, with a provocative, mysterious smile.

She caught both his hands and held them. Her heart was sick at the thought of the bad news which must be told him to-morrow, and she could not respond to his mood of gaiety.

"I'm glad you remembered, but I didn't want a present," she maintained.

"You wait until you see it, and here it is!" as a maid entered carrying a large cardboard box. "I arranged for it to be sent by special messenger so that you could wear it this evening."

He was busy untying the cord as he spoke. "I hope it's the right size," he continued. "Martha gave me a dress of yours as a guide."

"And you thought of all that!" she returned, as she watched his struggle with the cord.

The lid of the box was off now, and layers of white tissue paper disclosed to view. He dived beneath them and, catching hold of an end of some gauzy material of dull gold tinsel, brought gradually to light a garment which the Queen of Sheba might have worn on her royal visit to Solomon.

He shook the gleaming folds free from the encumbering layers of tissue paper, and held the dress at arms' length. "The orange sash is fetching," he opined. "It's the daring touch which gives the note of distinction."

"It's lovely," she agreed, "but——"

"There are to be no 'buts,'" he retorted. "What you want is confidence. You're too faint-hearted in the matter of clothes." He held the dress against her experimentally. "It'll suit you perfectly," he declared.

She sighed. "I don't somehow feel like that frock to-day," she said. "It isn't that I'm ungrateful, Andrew, but——"

"What's the matter? Got a headache?"

"No, but I had such a horrid dream last night."

"That was the result of supper-going after the theatre."

"The horror wasn't on the surface," she continued, unheeding his interruption. "I thought I was in a large house, in which there were wide staircases and

long corridors all carpeted in red. The walls were red and the electric lights were covered with red shades. The atmosphere was warm and scented, but I knew something dreadful lurked underneath, and that at any moment I might be confronted by it."

"You ought to take to literature. You have the imagination of a De Quincey. Go on."

She seated herself in a chair by the fire and continued: "At last I came to a flight of stairs, at the bottom of which ran a long passage ending in a curtained recess. It was darker than the other parts of the house, and as I descended the stairs my fear grew. A woman stood at the bottom of the stairs watching me——" Josephine paused for a moment, then went on: "All at once, as the woman looked at me, I became afraid with the worst sensation of horror I had yet experienced. I seemed to see myself in her. She led the way along the passage towards the crimson curtain——"

He stood looking out of the window, his hands in his pockets, but something in his attitude told her he was listening intently, and she went on: "The curtain concealed a door, and I opened it. As I did so the warmth of the atmosphere was replaced by a still, frozen calm, like a breath from some Arctic region. I was in a room lit by a cold light and full of flowers—white, waxy flowers, with a sweet, heavy odour. Great masses of them were heaped in the middle of the room; they seemed to hide something——" she stopped with a shudder, then concluded abruptly, "I woke at that point."

He turned suddenly. "I'm hanged if you haven't succeeded in giving me a thrill," he said, shaking himself uneasily. "You must be out of sorts to dream *like that*. Come along and let's get dressed, or we shall be late for dinner."

CHAPTER XX

JOSEPHINE looked down the programme. Two songs, a 'cello solo, a pianoforte and violin duet, then Andrew's original composition, "A Gipsy Fantasia."

She had put on the golden gown with a feeling of "All is vanity of vanities." Andrew had said nice things about her appearance, but his compliments fell on dulled ears. She had a sensation of treachery in the secret knowledge of that tiny blood-stained handkerchief, and witnessed his gaiety during dinner with a fateful foreboding that it was for the last time.

It was a relief when he left her, and now as she sat alone in the crowd, reading her programme, her face was full of brooding trouble.

In her most cheerful moments she found Queen's Hall a depressing building. The music of the great masters which in a cathedral or an opera house found a sympathetic setting, seemed here to waste its fragrance in a drab desolation of space peopled by apathetic midgets.

The hall was filling rapidly. The concert had been largely advertised, and many had come to hear the new violinist. Josephine watched the occupants of the stalls file into their places. With some of them

she was familiar, by sight, and now and again she recognised a friend or acquaintance. At intervals some startling toilette would draw her attention, and it was in such a moment that the comments of two women who sat behind had caught her ear.

"What a ravishing cloak!"

"Which one?"

"The flame chiffon velvet with the gold storks. I do believe it's—yes, *it is!*"

"Who?"

"Madame Zorewski."

"Who's she?"

"My dear old thing—where d'you live? *Everybody* knows the beautiful Pole. She's supposed to be a widow, and nobody knows where she gets her money."

"Why should they know, it isn't their business, and she can't hang her husband's death certificate round her neck."

"I suppose you think that's smart. *I* think it's priggish—just when I was going to entertain you with a bit of scandal——" The speaker lowered her voice and Josephine's eyes followed Madame Zorewski to her seat.

The wearer of the flame-coloured cloak would not mind being stared at, thought Josèphine as she noticed the almost insolent indifference of the other's bearing. Her companion was a boy about twenty—a weedy youth with a hook nose and a vacuous mouth. As Josephine observed the pair, Madame Zorewski turned and the watcher had a view of the other's full face. It gave the lie in surprising fashion to the profile of a *passée* woman of forty. This was

almost the face of a girl with blue eyes set wide apart and dimples that came with the first widening of the curved mouth in a smile. An enigmatical personality, one that would certainly make history. The boy with the vacuous mouth could have no place in the life of such a woman, save perhaps to pay her dressmaker's bills or allow her to win money from him at cards. So Josephine decided as the fat soprano was led on to the platform and the concert commenced.

Josephine was scarcely aware of the passing of the first items on the programme, and the applause greeting Andrew's appearance on the platform took her by surprise. It beat on his figure like rain, and he bent his head under it, bowing from right to left like a doll pulled by a string. He had acquired no foreign airs during his residence abroad, and would always be something of the shy schoolboy on the platform. Josephine watched him, waiting for the moment when his eye would catch hers. His glance was travelling along the row just in front, and presently it stopped for an appreciable second at Madame Zorewski. By the merest flicker of an eyelid he was signalling to the woman in the flame-coloured cloak, and Josephine was witnessing the incident. Her heart missed a beat, then raced on at breakneck speed. In a flash she had found the answer to the question of who wrote the letter which had roused her curiosity. It was Madame Zorewski! There are moments when knowledge gained by means of intuition admits of no argument, and this was one of them. Josephine *knew*, and in making the discovery she learnt also that she was not mistress of herself. Her jealousy of Mignonette and the child were very different

things from this imperious assertion of her claim in the face of the predatory designs of another woman.

She sat paling and flushing by turns whilst Andrew's music crooned its way into the hearts of his hearers. She heard the notes through the roar as of surf on a beach. For the moment even the child was forgotten, whilst she faced what it would mean to her to have to stand by and see another woman appropriate the man she loved.

Was she going to faint? She looked round for the nearest exit, and there, sitting in the row behind her, was Erasmus.

He waited until the thunder of applause following Andrew's performance filled the hall, then he rose and signed to her to follow him. "You're ill," he said as he joined her in the gangway. "Let me take you out."

In the corridor she made an effort at self-control, explaining that there was nothing really the matter with her, only that she had had bad news that day and was rather unnerved.

He did not ask what the news was, but, accommodating his steps to her slow ones, walked with her towards the entrance.

"The car won't be here for another two hours," she said as they emerged into the street. "The fog's quite gone; I think I'll walk. I must give the attendant a message for my husband, though."

He glanced at her shoes when she returned, and she reassured him they were all right.

Regent Street lay bared to view under the moon's broad gaze, and they walked in silence for a few

minutes, then he began: "Your husband has a great gift, Josephine."

"Yes, it's genius, and it always seems to me that there's something 'primitive' in Andrew's music which would appeal as much to an uneducated as to an educated ear."

He gave a momentary look in her direction when she used her husband's Christian name, then turning his gaze once more to the pavement began argumentatively, "But what 'art' can be 'primitive'? Isn't it a contradiction in terms?" It was the old Erasmus, as eager for analysis as a schoolboy for play.

"It's no use, Erasmus," she said. "I'm not in the mood for it to-night."

There was a hardness in her tones which suggested repressed feeling, and he began again: "You spoke of having had 'bad news' just now?"

"I have. It's Andrew's little girl. Her mother died of consumption, and symptoms of the disease have already appeared in the child."

"You are fond of her?" he asked slowly.

"I love her dearly." Josephine's voice was eloquent.

"And your husband takes it badly?"

"He doesn't know yet. When he does——!"

"He's fond of the child?"

"She's his all."

"Ah!"

The single exclamation showed her what she had done. Once again she had involuntarily bared her heart to him. To follow up her involuntary confidence with further speech seemed impossible—not

that she regretted it, rather had she a vague sense of having shifted some burden, and accompanying the consequent relief came the certainty that Erasmus had made the inevitable deduction concerning Andrew's identification.

He broke the silence which followed to ask, "Josephine, are you happy?"

"No."

She breathed the word in a sigh which was something like a sob, so truly did it express the pent-up anguish of the past year.

"He doesn't love you?"

"No."

Josephine's self-control, shattered by months of secret fretting, left her now, like some grieving child in the hands of a would-be consoler. She was incapable of anything more than that monosyllable. If she had essayed further speech she would have broken into hysterical weeping.

"Then why in God's name did you marry him?" There was something savage in Erasmus's surprise, and he spoke almost roughly.

His anger braced her to make an effort at explanation, and she told him briefly and in halting sentences the difficulty about little Mignon.

"It was not a sufficient reason," he replied, with decision.

"There was another," she admitted with reluctance. "He was lonely and wanted me."

"Was that all?"

"No," and she struggled against the impulse towards confession. "I could not bear to part from him. I felt that I would rather marry him *like that* than lose him altogether."

There was another long pause. They had turned into a side street where their shadows lengthened in front of them, and the quiet made room for echoes.

"Josephine!" His manner was impressive and hers was expectant as she waited for more.

"Why don't you tell him that you love him?" Erasmus got out the words with an obvious effort.

"Tell him!" She made a gesture of excited protest. "Tell him!" she repeated. "Oh, how *could* I?" and a sudden vision of the woman in the flame-coloured cloak was responsible for an added vehemence of manner.

"It will not be easy, but it's the best course you can take."

"It would be no use," she answered hopelessly. "And besides, it would spoil the friendship which now exists between us."

"I don't think so. I've seen him and watched him. He doesn't, I imagine, belong to that contrary class of individuals who are won by indifference and lost by love."

As she listened she was thinking of Madame Zorewski, thinking and wondering.

"Haven't you learned that yourself during all these months you have lived with him?" continued Erasmus. "Tell me, hasn't he always met you more than half-way in any display of affection?"

There was something almost suspicious in the listener's eyes when they sought her companion's. "How can you possibly know all that, about a stranger?"

"He's your husband, you see," Erasmus answered

simply. "I've met him several times at my club, and I *wanted* to understand him."

She felt all that these words at once implied and hid, but she only said, "Well, you've been pretty successful."

"Which ought to give you faith in my counsels."

"It isn't *that*—you don't understand."

"I understand the morbid fear of a rebuff, but you've got to take the sporting chance, and even should you meet with no response it will be best."

"But suppose," she began, "suppose . . ." She stopped short. No, she could not tell him her jealous suspicions, and all at once she seemed to see those suspicions in a ridiculous light—things evolved out of her own brain, like pictures seen in the fire.

"Yes," he reiterated, unheeding the interruption, "it will, in any case, be best for you and best for him." There was a note of finality in the words, and she divined that he did not wish to continue the subject. It was like Erasmus to plant an idea and leave time and circumstance to mature it.

"And what of yourself, Erasmus?" she began as they turned into the square. "I've had nothing but indirect news of you for a whole year."

They had stopped outside her door. The little world of the square lay asleep in the still night, the delicate tracery of the bare trees in the silver light making a phantom network to entangle the stars.

He mechanically pushed open the gate for her, then held out his hand, "My book comes out to-morrow," he said. "I will send you a copy if I may. I want you to read it."

"Is that the answer to my question?" she asked.

"The book is the answer. Good-night," and with one of those eloquent handshakes in which he seemed to wake temporarily to the expression of a more virile self, he was gone.

CHAPTER XXI

"I'M so glad you've come home, mam. Miss Mignon is very feverish and restless. I can't do nothing with her." Martha met her mistress in the hall, and Josephine with a renewed sense of impending disaster hurried to her room to change her dress.

Five minutes later she was beside Mignon's bed, looking fearfully at the flame-coloured cheeks and magnificent brilliancy of the blue eyes. "Mum," began the child excitedly, for she had learnt to call Andrew "father" and Josephine "mum," "the white Polly was in the Square again to-day and he looked *so* dirty. I don't b'lieve he's got a home."

Martha had followed her mistress into the room and stood at the foot of the bed gazing helplessly at the speaker. "I *told* her Polly had a home," said the girl with a reproving glance in Mignon's direction. "He belongs to the people next door but one, but she won't believe me."

Mignon's lower lip quivered. "'Tisn't true," she declared. "Martha's an old story-teller. He *hasn't* got a 'ome, else he wouldn't be in the Square all cold and dirty."

"We'll find out to-morrow," promised Josephine soothingly, "and if he *hasn't* got a home, we'll make one for him in a nice cage."

"But he doesn't *want* to live in a cage. God don't like birds put in cages—it's *crool*."

Josephine was accustomed to these contrary fits when the child couldn't sleep, and knew that a change of topic was safer than argument. "Do you remember that doll I gave you on your last birthday?" she began cheerfully.

"Yes," answered Mignon grudgingly. Honesty was at war with her desire to contradict, but honesty won the day.

"The one with the blue eyes that shut every time you put her to bed?" continued the questioner, with a dawning complacency.

"No, they didn't, mum," replied the restless child, with an irritability that nipped the other's satisfaction in the bud.

"Oh, Mignon!" said Josephine reproachfully.

"Well, they didn't," persisted Mignon, with that ill-used air which was ludicrously suggestive of Andrew when his will had been thwarted. "They broked, and kept open like mine are now."

Josephine looked significantly at Martha who was helplessly watching the little scene, then stooping down she lifted the child in her arms, saying, "Let mum walk up and down with you like daddy does, and sing you to sleep."

"I don't want to go to sleep," reiterated Mignon, but the objection was somewhat feebly made, and there was a dawning note of satisfaction in the voice.

Martha wrapped a shawl round the wakeful child, and Josephine commenced to walk backwards and forwards singing a coon song softly under breath, one which she had often heard on Mignonette's lips.

She sang it again and again during her monotonous

march backwards and forwards, until her breath began to come short with the exertion, and her arms to ache with the weight of her burden. Mignon meanwhile, although quiet, lay with her eyes wide open. Presently however she started turning her gaze to the doorway, and Josephine looking up saw Andrew.

"Give her to me, you look worn out," he said.

She did as he requested, then let her aching arms fall to her side.

"I got your message and was anxious about you, What was wrong?" he asked. "One of the attendants told me you had gone off with a gentleman!"

"It was Erasmus Langton," she answered smilingly, as she readjusted the shawl which had fallen off Mignon in the change of nurses. "I felt rather faint and had to go out into the corridor. He came with me and saw me home."

"Feel better now?"

"Oh, yes, I'm all right! It was nothing!"

He looked from her to the child, who was lying contentedly in his arms, "I'll soon send this scrap of perversity to sleep," he promised; "you had better get to bed."

His air of cheerful confidence smote on the knowledge of her withheld bad news like a blow, and she hurried from the room.

An hour later as she lay in bed she heard him enter his dressing-room and called to him, "Is she all right?"

"Gone off as sound as a top." He entered and seated himself on the edge of the bed.

Josephine gave a sigh of relief and he looked at her

observantly. "It strikes me very forcibly there's more need to worry about you than about the child. I shall take you to see Sir Ivor Thomas."

"Oh, it's not me—it *is* the child!" and sitting up in bed suddenly she reached forward and put a shaking hand on his arm.

He observed her with roused attention. "You're keeping something from me," he said. "What is it?"

"I only knew this afternoon," and her voice was harsh with the pain it cost her to deal the blow. "It's—oh, Andrew!—it's the old story, I fear," and in a few words she told him of the thing which had given rise to her anxiety.

He listened with a quietness of manner which told nothing, then to her surprise said, "I don't believe it. You have worked yourself up into a nervous state over nothing."

"But I saw the handkerchief!"

"And what if you did! Probably a tiny vessel in the throat or nose had broken, but I'll see Ivor Thomas to-morrow and make an appointment."

She lay back on her pillow again to some extent comforted. "Are you sure you are not pretending a confidence you don't feel?" she asked earnestly.

He regarded her absently for a minute or two, then said suddenly, "Of course I'm not pretending." He rose to his feet and stood by the bedside looking down upon her with a forced smile, then he stooped down with a quick movement and kissed her on the cheek. "Go to sleep, dear, and don't worry," he advised as he turned away.

But she had detected the fear he would not admit to himself, and lying wakeful the greater part of the night, had ample time for sad speculations.

What would Andrew do if the child should die? Was it possible that she herself could enter with him into that hour of anguish? Mignon was not *her* child. No, he would be alone in his grief, and it seemed to her she could be but an intruder upon his sorrow.

Then her thoughts reverted to the concert and her subsequent talk with Erasmus. What had ailed her at the concert? She was frightened and humiliated at the recollection of her complete loss of self-control. She had always thought of hysterical women partly with contempt, and partly with a tolerant pity, and now it looked very much as if she was one of them! Andrew was right. She must be out of sorts.

Erasmus did not know how foolish she had been, and probably concluded that the heat of the hall had made her feel faint. Fate had constituted him her confessor, but she could not have told him of that extraordinary moment of—was it intuition or morbid imagination? Did Andrew and the woman in the flame-coloured cloak exchange glances of understanding? And, even if they did, what of it? Andrew had many friends in the musical world, a world where there was a great deal of camaraderie between the sexes, and Madame Zorewski had the look of a professional. It was ridiculous to connect her with the letter which Andrew had thrust unread into his pocket. It also showed a perverse inclination to brew trouble that she should take it for granted there was something in the letter her husband wanted to hide.

Whilst she reasoned so with herself, Erasmus's words, "Tell him that you love him," were repeating themselves in the background of her thoughts.

'Tell him that you love him." Her heart began to beat almost as if at the solicitation to some act of wrongdoing. It was the suggested impulse to a reckless squandering of her hidden treasure. "Tell him that you love him," and if he should look coldly on you, never mind. You would have had your one mad moment of truth!

Had Erasmus meant that when he said it would be better for Andrew, and better for herself? Had he grasped all that it meant to herself—did he understand? Had he thought of a possible danger, namely, that her words, while leaving Andrew unresponsive to her love for him, might rouse that side of his nature which she feared? No, Erasmus could not have foreseen such a contingency, and she dared not run the risk. For a few blissful moments she pictured to herself what it would be if Andrew in response to her confession should say, "I love you," as a good man says it to a good woman. But if he should . . . ? No, she could not take Erasmus's advice at present. She felt that her instinct to drift with the tide, to await the development of events, was, for the time being, the right one.

From the seething tumult of her own thoughts and passionate longings and perplexities, she turned to the recollection of Erasmus with relief. His victory over self was something that filled her with the exultant recognition of a splendid deed. She divined the struggle it had cost him to say to her that which might have the effect of drawing herself and her husband together. To think of him was to get into a freer atmosphere. She wondered what message his book had for her—what answer to her question about himself.

At this point she fell asleep and dreamed she was trapped in a burning house. Andrew was calling, "Come Josephine, come," and his voice had in it a sound of quick terror. He had her by the arm, and in seeking to extricate it from his nervous clutch she awoke to find her arm really imprisoned, Andrew was standing by her bedside. "Come, Josephine, quick!" he implored—"Mignon."

She sprang out of bed as if electrified, her senses alert, her whole being awake and ready for action. She knew that the blow had fallen, that the vague fear of months past had sprung upon them like some relentless, demoniac foe.

"I'm ready," she answered, catching up her dressing-gown, getting into it as she followed him out of the room and down the corridor leading to the nursery.

Martha was standing at the door wringing her hands. Andrew pushed past her, and Josephine followed him across the threshold. Then she paused for one moment with a sudden sensation of physical nausea, but he had caught her arm in a vice-like grip, saying, "There's no one but you. I must go for Thomas. I want Martha to get some ice."

"Yes—yes—go!" recovering instantaneously from her momentary weakness, she pushed him towards the door. Then she set her teeth and turned towards the bed.

The electric light fell pitilessly on the hideous scarlet stains defiling the white sheets, and on the little huddled form. Martha had hastly propped Mignon's head up with pillows, and she lay, her shoulders rounded like those of an old person.

Josephine seated herself by the bed in torturing

inactivity, listening meanwhile to Andrew's hurried rush down the long corridor and the bang of a closing door. In the blank that followed the whole place was plunged into a bottomless gulf of silence. Martha had gone out to fetch some ice, and Josephine was alone with the sick child.

Mignon lay perfectly still with the supine stillness of exhaustion, her eyes were closed and her lips slightly parted, their redness empurpled with a hideous stain. Her breath came with an odd gurgling sound, and the watcher, dreading another attack of hemorrhage, wished she had told Martha, before the latter left the house, to rouse one of the servants. She wondered whether the child was conscious or not, and reaching forward, lightly touched the soft cheek. Mignon at once opened her eyes and smiled at her companion—as children, incapable of pose, will smile in their death agony.

Josephine returned the smile, at a cost which only those who have so acted in like circumstance can understand. Then Mignon closed her eyes again and drifted out on a tide of unconsciousness, leaving the lonely watcher to fight desperately against an inrush of despair. At such times the heart's affection becomes a sensitive exposed nerve, into which each memory thrusts its individual weapon. Remorse for all those lapses of thought or love that occur in the wear and tear of everyday life, the memory of joys that are gone, too little appreciated while they lasted. Mignon was before her in a hundred guises. Romping with Andrew. . . . Curled up in her own lap while she told her stories. . . . Elusive and mischievous as she was when well, dependent and contradictory as she was when ill or tired. . . . Coming to the

bedside on the morning of Josephine's birthday with a few dirty-looking sweets wrapped up in a sticky piece of paper, and a little bunch of limp daisies that had been picked the day before. Mignon. . . . Josephine clenched her hands while her throat swelled and ached. "Oh, God, don't let her die," she prayed.

The slow minutes passed and neither Andrew nor Martha returned. It was now six o'clock, and soon it would be getting light. Sir Ivor Thomas, whom Andrew had gone to fetch, was a consulting physician in Harley Street, and presumably not accustomed to being dragged out of his bed at so early an hour; but he was an old family friend of the Murisons, and Andrew had gone to him naturally in this emergency.

At last there was the sound of an entrance below and footsteps on the stairs and voices. Andrew had returned, bringing the doctor with him. They entered the room together, the doctor greeting her with an air of ceremonious politeness which was characteristic. His manners were as punctilious and antique as was his dress. He was a little man about five feet high, with small, delicate features, and curly grey hair as soft and silky as that of a Yorkshire terrier. He still adhered to those fashions in dress which were in vogue in his youth, and this morning, in the chill, grey light of dawn, he looked as spotlessly fresh as if he had just made a leisurely toilet. Josephine, in the midst of her trouble, found herself wondering how he had managed it. But she knew that this sleek little dandy was a man to be reckoned with in the world of science, and as he approached the bed and proceeded to make his examination of

the patient, he assumed the attributes of a deity who held the scales of her fate.

. Andrew meanwhile had gone out of the room, and while Josephine assisted the doctor in his task, she could hear her husband's footsteps pass slowly backwards and forwards down the length of the corridor.

Mignon submitted patiently, only opening her eyes languidly now and again to observe the strange face bending over her. At last it was ended, and Sir Ivor Thomas proceeded to get into his silk-lined cloak again. Josephine looked at him with a question in her eyes, but he only said, " I should like to have a conversation with your husband, Mrs. Murison. I will leave all instructions with him."

She heard the two men exchange a few words outside the door, and the muffled sound of their footsteps down the carpeted corridor.

There followed a blank broken a few minutes later by the entrance of Martha with the ice. She began a whispered account of her journey in search of it, then, obeying her mistress's instructions, went to find a hammer and a knitting needle wherewith to splinter the frozen block. Josephine meanwhile was listening intently for a sound from downstairs. It came after a further short interval—the closing of the front door. She listened for another sound—that of Andrew's footsteps ascending the stairs, but they did not come.

Martha returned with the implements for splitting the ice, and Josephine inserted some splintered fragments between the little patient's lips. Then she said, " Martha, I must go and speak to your master. Wait here until I come back."

She went slowly. There were movements in the

dining-room, and she looked in. The housemaid was pulling up the blinds. "Do you know where the master is?" asked her mistress.

"Yes, madam. I saw him go into the music-room just now."

Josephine turned and walked with lagging footsteps towards the room indicated. She stood outside the door for a moment, taking a deep breath, then she turned the handle and entered.

Andrew was seated by a table littered with disordered piles of music and writing materials. His elbow rested on the table, and his head on his hand. He had his back towards the door, and did not turn at the sound of her entrance. She came and stood in front of him, but he gave no sign of being aware of her presence.

She touched his arm. "What did he say, Andrew?" she asked.

He avoided her eyes. "I thought you were upstairs," he remarked.

"What did he say, Andrew?"

"I don't know what he said, but it's all up with her." He had dropped his eyes again towards the table, and spoke mechanically.

For the second time that morning Josephine was seized with a sensation of physical nausea, and a trembling of the limbs which caused her to seat herself in the nearest chair. "What do you mean?" she got out with difficulty.

"To put it plainly, I mean that she has only a few hours to live. You know Thomas's damned politeness—I don't remember how he expressed it, but it's all up with her, and he doesn't think she will last through the day."

The sensation of faintness was increasing, and she was conscious of an icy coldness on her forehead. She leaned forward in her chair and clutched at a corner of the table. He looked up quickly and without a word fetched a spirit decanter from a cupboard at hand. He poured some brandy from it into a glass and offered it to her silently. She drank it, and sat with her head bent forward a moment or two; then she took her handkerchief from her pocket and wiped her damp forehead.

"Better?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered, and rose to her feet.

They stood facing each other, and she put her two hands on his arms, steadying herself with an effort. "Andrew," she began.

He took her hands in a grasp of iron. "Don't," he answered; "don't, Josephine; I can't stand it."

He released her hands and she moved towards the door. "Where are you going?" he asked.

"Back to the child," she replied.

"Yes—go," he said. "I can't—yet."

CHAPTER XXII

IT was eight o'clock that same evening and Josephine had just come out of the nursery, closing the door softly behind her. She stood listening for a moment, then walked slowly into her own room and sat down in a corner of the couch.

She still wore the dressing-gown into which she had got so hurriedly that morning. A gong sounded, and from sheer force of habit she half rose from her seat with an uneasy recollection that she had not changed for dinner. Dinner! with Mignon lying dead in the nursery, and Andrew shut up alone in the music room. She fell back in her seat and stared vacantly before her. There was nothing to do until Martha returned from an errand on which her mistress had sent her. The work of the day was over—a day into which there had been crowded the stress of years. Now in this hour of strange idleness she was living it all over again; from that moment when Andrew had roused her in the early morning, until half-past seven that evening, when he had silently turned away from the nursery and had gone downstairs and shut himself in the music-room. He was there now, alone, and she was here alone, between them a gulf of nothingness.

Martha entered the room, her arms full of florist's blue-paper parcels. "I had to go to more than

one shop," she explained. "Lilies of the valley are very scarce just now, and they hadn't as many as you wanted at Brown's." She unpinned the parcels as she spoke and disclosed her fragile, scented treasures. Her eyes were red and she spoke listlessly, looking at the flowers through rising tears.

Josephine, without a word, received them from the other's hands, and walked towards the nursery, followed by Martha. The two entered the death-chamber and closed the door. There followed a period of quiet, broken only by the soft movements of the two women about their labour of love. At last all was finished and little Mignon lay ready for burial, fair and white, with that evanescent and unearthly beauty which sometimes follows directly after death.

Josephine put the last flower in its place, then straightened herself and leant against the bed-rail. The child's flannel dressing-gown was hanging on it, and Martha took hold of it with the intention of folding it away. As she did so, the contents of the pocket rolled out on to the floor and Josephine stooped to pick them up. A tiny pocket-handkerchief, a ball of brightly-coloured wool, a diminutive thimble and a piece of folded paper. She smoothed out the paper and looked at the grotesque work of art portrayed on it—some uncouth figures, with pot-hooks and hangers for arms and legs, and a rolling-pin on four sticks labelled "dog." As she looked a great sob rose from the depths of her being, shaking her as a reed is shaken by the wind. "Oh, Martha!" she said, and the next moment the two women were weeping in each other's arms.

They sat down on the edge of the bed, holding each other fast with that desperate longing of the bereaved

for some human touch to penetrate the loneliness of their grief—a loneliness to which the mourned-for dead are so strangely callous. The little white figure on the bed, which had always been so fleet of foot when comfort was needed, lay indifferent to the anguish of the two women who had loved and tended it. Their shadows rocked backwards and forwards across the flower-decked whiteness, seeming to give it a semblance of movement, but it was only the response of the inanimate to the mobile play of light and shade over its surface.

Josephine and Martha sat together on the edge of the bed until the clock in the corridor chimed ten, then the former with a shuddering sigh rose to go. And all this time Andrew was shut up alone in the music-room. He had not for one moment been absent from Josephine's thoughts as she went about her sad task. Her hearing, strung to a pitch of sensitive acuteness, had been alert while her hands were busy, and she knew he had not left the house.

Seated in the corner of the couch in her own room, she listened for the sound of a closing door, or his footsteps on the stairs. Never before had she longed as now to hold out to him arms of refuge and comfort, but never before had they been separated by such realms of distance.

If only she dared go to him! But what right had she to intrude on his grief? Andrew in this hour was a stranger to her, and the thought of approaching him was one that filled her with a sense almost of guilty cowardice. Mignon was not her child. If Mignon's mother had been here, she and Andrew would have been together in their hour of desolation. No one

else could accompany him on that dark road down which he was now journeying.

Josephine sat over the embers in the grate, shivering with cold and fatigue. There were no more coals at hand to replenish the fire ; they had been forgotten by the housemaid in the day's disorganisation, and the temperature of the room suggested a frost outside.

Eleven o'clock struck and a new fear began to take hold of her. What was Andrew doing down there all alone ? One heard of men and women taking their own lives at such a crisis. He had acted so strangely all day too, only entering the death-chamber ten minutes before the end, and leaving it again dazed and speechless. Twice during the long hours of watching she had left Mignon to go to him, and each time she had found him sitting in the same position with his head on his hand, motionless, oblivious to externals.

She rose to her feet suddenly, this new fear effectually routing the swarm of brooding thoughts. She must go down at once to him. How could she have stayed away so long ! Suppose, while she had been selfishly shrinking from the fear of a rebuff, he had—— Good God ! of what had she been thinking to leave him alone so long !

With an eagerness to reach him as intense as her heretofore reluctance had been, she went swiftly towards the door which stood between herself and his agony. She steeled herself to face it, and entered softly. When she saw him she caught her breath between relief and anguished pity.

He was crouched over the fire, staring into it helplessly, his attitude expressive of that abandon-

ment to grief which is indifferent to the keeping up of appearances.

She moved behind him, and putting her hands on his shoulders said, "Andrew."

He neither stirred nor answered her, and coming round to face him, she cried in a broken voice, "Dear!"

He took her hand and stroked it in silence.

She seated herself on the fender stool, and, holding both his hands, laid her face against them. They stayed together thus for what seemed a long time—neither speaking—she with her head on his knees, and he bowed over her. At last a tear, not her own, splashed on to her face, and then she spoke. "Andrew, I loved her too; I can understand."

"She was my child," he answered, every word coming with intense difficulty.

"Yes, she was your child, but I loved her too. *Let* me understand—*let* me be with you."

"You can't, Josephine. I must bear it alone."

She dropped her head on his hands again helplessly—silenced by the finality of his words.

Presently he released one of his hands from her clasp, and stroked her hair with a pathetic, fumbling movement. "You were a good mother to her."

She had no answer ready, but a long-drawn sob.

"I had looked forward," he began, with frequent pauses between his words, "to so bright a future for her, and now it's all ended."

"Yes, it's all ended," she repeated the words in an irrelevant, foolish fashion which sounded strangely. She was not aware of having said them. In her heart was a sudden tumult. Should she say "No, it's not all over. I love you." Should she take him in her

arms now and say, "You *shall* love me—you shall *not* be lonely. *I* will fill your life—and some day there may be *our* child." Her whole being was one mighty throb, and rising to her feet she stood over him. For one moment—then, with a rush came the recollection of what lay upstairs and the flame of her excitement was suddenly quenched. How could she at such a time think of her own passion! For, love Andrew as truly and purely as she might, there must always be the overmastering element of self in such an emotion.

He looked up and, observing her worn appearance, said, "How tired you must be; go to bed, Josephine, and try to sleep to please me."

And with sad, lingering footsteps she went.

CHAPTER XXIII

IT was a day of darkness and yellow fog in the London streets. Josephine had come out in desperation, unable to bear the worse gloom indoors. It was a month since Mignon's death, a month during which two aches strove for the mastery—the ache of that great emptiness which the child's absence had left behind, and the ache of having to look on from the outside at Andrew's suffering.

Since that night when she had gone to him in the music-room they had kept silence with each other on the subject of their grief. The bond which had united them was broken, it seemed. The child who had made of their union a natural thing was gone. In the worst hours of Josephine's unhappiness Mignon had stood between the lonely woman and self-consciousness. Mignon needed her, and Andrew needed her through Mignon. But now Mignon was gone, and Andrew had said, " I must bear it alone " ! A curtain of reserve had dropped between them which she dared not try to lift.

Day after day, week after week, she watched in vain for some little rift in the leaden sky of his gloom, some dawning of faint awakening interest in life. Most of his engagements were cancelled, his violin was untouched, his books unopened, and his letters unanswered.

Night after night she would listen from her bed

for his footsteps past her door, and sometimes she would rise and, creeping down the long corridor, would stand listening outside the room where he sat, until a cough or movement inside set to rest a horrible and nameless fear. Twice lately she had crept back to her bed with another new fear at work in her heart, a fear which the clink of a glass against a bottle had suggested.

In coming out to-day she was acting on the pathetic impulse of the sad who try to forget their own sorrow in ministering to the loneliness of others. The recollection of Miss Vincenza had suddenly appeared on her empty horizon. Miss Vincenza, with her house of mad dreams built on the sands of old age, with the pathos of her cramped life and self-centred interests, and the irony of an optimism which was as the visions of a man born blind.

An impulse to go and see the cranky old lady had occurred, and Josephine was now acting on it. Passing a large fancy shop, from which a radius of light made feeble resistance to the fog, she paused to glance in at the window, and observing some crimson leather collars adorned with silver bells, went in and bought one for Thomas. Mignon had loved Thomas. She would take him a gift for Mignon's sake, and because she rightly judged it would be the surest way of giving pleasure to his owner.

She found her way with difficulty through the thick obscurity in which familiar landmarks were swallowed up. The little row of houses where Mignonette had lived had lost all their distinctive characteristics in the bewildering gloom, and were just so many yards of railings, and so many street doors looming in turns out of the enveloping smoky vapour.

Josephine came suddenly on the name of Dobbs, in gold letters on a black board, with a start of surprise. It seemed to jump at her out of the past, bringing with it a hundred poignant recollections. She knocked at the door, and as she stood waiting for admittance she heard the faint sound of Miss Vincenza's crazy old piano. Mrs. Dobbs answered the summons, and the quavering voice of the tuneless instrument came out to greet the visitor in a thin, cracked peal of bells.

"I need not ask if Miss Vincenza is at home," said Josephine.

"Bless me, no," answered Mrs. Dobbs. "She's bin at it all day, and I'm *that* thankful you have come to stop her!"

Mrs. Dobbs knocked at Miss Vincenza's door, announcing "Miss Delmar," and Josephine did not pause to correct her.

But Miss Vincenza apparently knew better, and coming forward to meet her visitor said with empressement, "How exceedingly kind of you to call, Mrs. Murison."

"And so you heard the news? Mrs. Dobbs hasn't apparently."

"I read it in the *Morning Post*. I never omit to look at the births, marriages and deaths column. I didn't mention it to Mrs. Dobbs. I don't gossip with people of her class."

The room was lit by two composite candles in old-fashioned brass candlesticks, their thin flames making a centre of dim, yellow light round which the gloom of the afternoon lay in ambush. The fog with its stifling fumes and defiling touch had entered the house, causing Miss Vincenza a troublesome cough,

and giving her a dirty face. Her hands were grimy and the magnificent rings she still wore threw off showers of parti-coloured lights as she placed a chair for her visitor.

"I must explain the reason for the performance which greeted your arrival," she continued. "It's Thomas's birthday, and I always mark the event by playing the bells."

"Where is Thomas?" asked Josephine.

"Here he is, the darling!" and the speaker dragged from under the table a hassock on which the cat was sleeping.

"I've brought this for him," said Josephine, taking the red leather collar with its silver bells from her muff.

Miss Vincenza sat back in her chair with a genuine attitude of delighted surprise. "What a delightful coincidence!" she exclaimed. "Such a charming birthday present for the previous pet!"

Thomas, with much coaxing on Miss Vincenza's part, and much stifled bad language on his own, accompanied by an unconcealed hatred of the proposed adornment, submitted surlily to his new honours. The collar fixed and himself now fully awake, he sat up on his hind legs sneezing and shaking his head in his efforts to get free from the unaccustomed fetter. At each shake the silver bells were set tinkling, increasing his surprised sense of ill-usage to the point of desperation. But Miss Vincenza was not to be intimidated into setting him free. Thomas, she explained, must be taught the virtue of restraint, and the collar would serve an educative purpose.

"I often see Mr. Murison's name in the papers," she began, "and last night I had the great pleasure of hearing him play at the Albert Hall. A friend of mine who had bought some tickets to help the hospitals sent me a stall."

"It's one of the few engagements he has kept lately," Josephine told Miss Vincenza. "I'm glad you were able to go."

"A most unusual dissipation for *me*. My black satin is very antiquated, but I wore the rose point fichu, and felt that I was holding my own. I looked round for you, Mrs. Murison, but my disappointment at missing you is more than atoned for by this kind visit."

Josephine said she was sorry not to have seen Miss Vincenza in her black satin and rose point.

"I wonder now, if you *had* been there, whether you would have done me the great honour of introducing me to your husband? Do you know, Mrs. Murison, that when he appeared on the platform I had a most curious sensation of having seen him before," and the speaker sent a cunning glance in the direction of her visitor.

Josephine began to feel she had foolishly walked into a trap. She had forgotten Miss Vincenza's love of scandal and her capacity for putting two and two together. "Probably you have," she suggested hurriedly. "His photographs have been in all the papers."

"I've seen them, and they don't do him justice. I had the opportunity last night of observing him closely. During the interval he was talking to a beautiful and most distinguished-looking woman who

sat just in front of me. She had on a cloak which in *my* youth would have been worn only by creatures of a certain class, but in *these* days it seems the ambition of women in society to ape the manners of the *demi-mondaine*."

"What kind of cloak was it?" Josephine asked the question in the hurry of covering the start she could not repress.

"An outrageous garment covered with grotesque gold embroideries—fit for nothing better than to be wrapped round a wooden idol in a heathen temple. But perhaps you've seen it and know the lady?"

"No, I don't know her. She may be a professional. My husband has many friends amongst them whom I've never met."

"Yes, that of course is inevitable. No doubt he is also very much run after by society women who collect celebrities."

"If he is, I hear nothing about it," asserted Josephine.

"You wouldn't," retorted the old lady with acumen.

The listener began to experience the old instinct for flight, and this time it was dictated by something more than the desire to escape from a depressing influence. There was a witch-like quality about Miss Vincenza that provoked in Josephine a feeling approaching terror. It was Miss Vincenza who had discovered the identity of Andrew with Mignonette's unknown lover, and now she had put her finger on that revealing moment of jealousy which had lain buried and almost forgotten under the grief of the last few weeks.

"You're not going!" objected the old lady as Josephine looked towards the door. "There are quite a number of things I want to say, and you haven't told me how little Mignon is getting on. Did you keep her with you after your marriage?"

The listener paled. What misdirected impulse had caused her to subject herself on this Dantean afternoon to Miss Vincenza's strange malice and curiosity. It *was* malice, there could be no other word for the impish ingenuity of the attack. The old lady had evidently recognised in Andrew Murison, the celebrated violinist, the betrayer of Mignonette. How much else had her uncanny powers of divination fathomed?

"She's dead." Josephine spoke in a low strangled voice and *this* time it was the listener who was taken unaware.

"'Dead.' Oh dear! you've given me quite a shock, Mrs. Murison. Was it sudden? You said nothing about it. I notice now that you're wearing black——"

"It seemed sudden, but it wasn't, really."

"Ah! tuberculosis, I suppose. An inheritance from that poor unfortunate girl, her mother."

"Yes, she died after an attack of hemorrhage of the lungs."

"Well, perhaps it's better," with a facile adoption of the necessary tone of condolence. "She would have been handicapped by her illegitimacy and, without parents—" the old lady shot another of her monkey-like glances in the visitor's direction, and continued, "*You* took her out of the kindness of your heart, and your husband——"

clock. The little commotion of an arrival as a stick was dropped, and a bag dumped on to the floor. In an instant she was out of bed and had caught up her dressing-gown. She got into it as she crossed the room, and opening her door was dazzled by the glare of the electric light. Andrew had switched on all the burners, and stood in front of the hall stand divesting himself of his overcoat.

He turned at the sound of her opening door with a ready apology. "I meant to come in quietly," he began, "but I dropped that beastly stick on the tiles. I hope I didn't scare you, Josephine?"

"You did—a bit. I'd given you up."

"I expect you had. It's all Carrol's fault. I met him on the boat, and he insisted on my going home to dinner with him. Two other men were coming and he wanted to make up four for bridge. I won seven and sixpence and I've had to walk all the way home from Hampstead." Judging from his manner he had not found the experience unpleasant. She had not seen him so cheerful since the child's death, and as she watched him hang up his coat she wondered how much of real truth there was in the reason he had given for his late arrival.

He approached her and stooping down kissed her cheek.

"I hope you haven't been dull. Is Barbara Langton here?"

"No, I didn't ask her."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I just thought I wouldn't."

He looked at her for the first time. "I don't know whether it's this light or that flaming dressing-gown, but you look as white as a ghost!" he told her.

"I expect it's both, and one doesn't look one's best when one gets out of bed at three o'clock in the morning in a fright."

"Did you imagine it was a burglar?" He was switching off the lights as he spoke.

"No, I knew it was you."

"I hope you didn't wait dinner for me. I took it for granted Barbara was here and that my absence wouldn't matter." He followed her into her room, talking as he went. He was apparently in that cheerful, communicative mood which ensues on a pleasant break in routine.

The last embers of the fire still glowed on the hearth and she went and stood over it. "I'm afraid, Andrew," she began, "you've got into the habit of thinking your absence 'doesn't matter'."

He paused in the act of lighting a cigarette, the match going out in his fingers as he stared at her averted profile. "Well, now you come to speak of it, I suppose I have," he admitted quietly.

"It has ceased to be a 'home' either for you or me since Mignon went," she continued.

He threw the burnt-out match into the fire, and placed the unlighted cigarette on the mantelpiece.

"Is that how you feel, Josephine?" he asked.

"Yes, that's how I feel, Andrew," and she turned and looked him in the eyes.

For a moment or two they stood thus, then he seated himself on the bed with his hands in his pockets, and stared dismally at his boots. There was something ludicrously suggestive of the disconsolate boy in his attitude, and there came to her a despairing realisation of his irresponsibility. The tortures of mind she had been suffering seemed

gratuitous, and, for the moment, almost she was convicted of having made a fuss about nothing.

Having taken the plunge, however, she was determined not to draw back. "I've been thinking things over whilst you've been away, Andrew," she continued, "and I can see it's hard on you having a wife who is no wife . . . like myself . . ."

He lifted his head with a jerk and looked at her expectantly.

"I've a sense of justice," she went on painstakingly, "and I can see that I've no right to think you would—or at least to be angry if you *do*——"

"Do what?" He was fully roused now, waiting curiously, perhaps forebodingly, for her next words.

There was a moment's silence, then she said, "It's rather a long story, Andrew—and perhaps you're tired—To-morrow?"

"No, we'll have it to-night," he answered with decision. "I never felt more wide awake in all my life." He was taking her seriously now, and there was a certain satisfaction in the sign.

She picked up a small log which lay on the hearth, and dropped it into the glowing hollow of the smouldering embers.

"Feel cold?" he asked.

"Yes, a little." She crouched over the fire watching the blue flames lick the sputtering log, and he waited.

"I wonder whether you remember," she began; "but no, of course you wouldn't——"

He stared reflectively at the back view of her flame-clad shoulders over which the two thick ropes of dark hair fell heavily. "It's not very likely," he commented with a touch of sarcasm.

"It was the day you bought me the dress at Swan and Edgar's——"

"No, I haven't forgotten *that* day, Josephine. We both have cause to remember it."

She gave a gesture of assent. "The thing I'm going to tell you about began then," she went on, "but Mignon's death put it out of my mind for the time being."

He sat making an effort at recollection. "I can't think of anything——"

"It isn't anything you *would* think of—only a—a letter."

"'A letter.' What letter? Whose letter?"

"Yours, Andrew."

He sighed ostentatiously. "Look here, old thing, you surely don't expect me to recall the particular letters I had on a particular day more than a month ago!"

"I don't, but perhaps you'll understand when I tell you that *this* letter was written in a queer foreign-looking hand and you put it in your pocket, unread."

He started, his eyes dropping guiltily before her accusing glance for a moment, then he rallied himself and said lightly: "Did I? That was very clumsy of me. Now, if I'd been an adept at deception I should have ostentatiously read the letter under your eyes and left it lying about, afterwards."

Her anger rose at his tone, and the confession she had dreaded making was blurted out in an impulse at retaliation. "That's what you *did* do, practically," she told him. "You dropped one just like it out of your pocket the afternoon you went away, and I've read it!"

"The devil you *did!*" He rose and took a turn across the room.

Then he came back, and standing over the fire mechanically produced his cigarette case, and as mechanically opened it.

"Yes, Andrew. It was a mean thing to do, but I can't honestly say I regret it. It's time my eyes were opened."

There followed a curious pause, then he said shamefacedly: "I wonder which letter it was?"

"Were there so many?" she was quick to retort.

"I'm not in the witness box," and now there was a sulky note in his voice.

"Yes, you are, Andrew. We've got to have this thing out, for your sake and my sake. We've both been to blame, and I'm asking no more from you in the way of admissions than I'm ready to make. The letter I read was the one in which your—friend asked you to spend a week-end with her in Paris."

He muttered an imprecation under his breath. "That comes of prying," he declared irritably. "I suppose you've been worrying yourself into fiddle-strings over this, concocting a three volume novel out of it. I know what women are!"

"I don't doubt it," she answered significantly. "Madame Zorewski, herself, would be a liberal education."

"'Madame Zorewski,'" he echoed. "What d'you know about *her?*"

"A great deal. To begin with, I know she's the woman who wrote that letter, and I know she has an unenviable reputation. I saw her at Queen's Hall *that night*, and heard some people who sat behind me discussing her."

"But how," he reiterated, "how did you know it was she who wrote the letter? She never signs herself anything but 'Nino.' Somebody must have been gossiping."

She shook her head. "You told me yourself!"

His jaw dropped and he eyed her with something almost akin to admiration. "'Sherlock Holmes' isn't in it!" he declared, and it really seemed as if he was beginning to enjoy the situation.

But to Josephine the issues were too tragic for such asides, and she went on: "I saw you exchange glances with her when you appeared on the platform. I was waiting for you to find *me*, but you were so busy looking at *her*, you forgot all about me. I'd been thinking of *that letter* and I put two and two together."

"Well, you were right," and he gave her the look he would have given a child who had done something clever. "But you might not have been," he went on argumentatively, "and it's a risky sort of game to play. Appearances can be terribly deceitful, you know."

She listened with a growing sense of hopelessness. Was this dodging of personal issues due to stratagem or frivolity? "I don't want to discuss the right or wrong of it," she told him firmly. "We've got to decide what's to be done."

The threat underlying the question was successful, and he echoed blankly, "'What's to be done?'"

"Yes, Andrew. It's too late, *now*, to patch up things between us. I went down to Stoneham's Green on Sunday hoping to catch you before you left for Paris. I thought perhaps—but you'd gone," and her voice broke on the last word.

"Well I'm blest!" The exclamation came after a moment's pause, during which he appeared to have been meditating the significance of her communication. "What was the idea?" he continued, with the air of one who honestly seeks enlightenment.

"I told you—I thought, if I could see you, and we could have a talk, that perhaps—perhaps you wouldn't go. Can't you see? Oh, Andrew! *Can't* you see? Do you think it doesn't matter—that I can shut my eyes to that sort of thing!"

His bewilderment increased. "I don't know what the devil you're driving at, Josephine," he declared. "Why should you be so anxious to prevent my taking an innocent little trip to Paris."

"'Innocent!'"

He looked at her, the light of a sudden idea dawning in his eyes. "Yes, 'innocent.' I didn't take Madame Zorewski with me—if that's what you're driving at."

He spoke the truth and she knew it with such a sensation of happiness as had not been hers for many long months. She had misjudged him! and shame and remorse mingling with sudden reaction from torturing suspicions left her speechless.

"You *did* think it," he accused her.

"Yes, Andrew, I did."

"That comes of reading other people's letters. If you hadn't read *that* letter it would never have occurred to you to associate my trip to Paris with Madame Zorewski."

"It wouldn't," she agreed in humbled tones. "All the same it *wasn't* a nice letter for you to have received from another woman."

"Some men would think it was a *very* nice letter," he retorted flippantly.

"Perhaps *you* did?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"And she wouldn't have written it," persisted Josephine, "unless she had received a great deal of encouragement."

"Well, one can't be rude to a charming woman."

"Especially when she makes love to you."

He became restive. "Look here, Josephine," he began, "there has been nothing more than friendship (flirtation if you like) between Madame Zorewski and myself, and it's not going any further. She's the sort who demands a slavish homage as her right, and if I'm to be a slave it will be to my profession; I've no intention of being entangled in the sort of intrigue which is the breath of life to this type of woman. I've been talking to Mazzarelli in Paris. The old chap always does me good—and I've come back to *work*."

"Yes, you said that in your letter—but I couldn't be glad when I read it because I thought it was *her* influence which had got you out of the bog."

"Well, it *was*, you know—in a way."

She winced as the thrust went home. "You've been pretty lonely, Andrew," she said. "Don't think I haven't seen *your* side of the question. I saw it even in the worst moments. I said to myself, 'It's *my* fault. I never ought to have married him.'"

"We *have* made rather a muddle of things," he agreed, "but suppose we divide the blame, and make a fresh start."

"A fresh start." Her breath came unevenly. Here was the opportunity for which she had longed.

Words trembled on her lips, but in picturing such a scene beforehand she had not reckoned with Andrew's complete unconsciousness of her intentions. "A fresh start" on his lips did not mean that which it meant in her thoughts. For him it stood for a matter-of-fact acceptance of the old relations, and it was not so that she could fight Andrew's tendency to wander.

"Yes," he went on thoughtfully. "It's been a bit of rough road for both of us since the child died. One seems to go about, a target for every thoughtless word or unsympathetic look?"

"I understand that. God knows I do, Andrew."

"Josephine," he said with an abrupt change of tone, "I've been drinking too much lately. Did you notice?"

"I feared it."

"It was not that the thing had any attraction for me. But I was desperate, and it enabled me to cultivate a thick skin. However—" and he made a gesture of repudiation.

She nodded. "I'm not afraid, now you're working again."

The clock on the landing struck four and he noticed her pallor. "You're thoroughly knocked up!" he exclaimed. "It's just like my thoughtlessness to come in to jaw at three o'clock in the morning. Why didn't you turn me out?" and he looked towards the door.

"I didn't want to turn you out, Andrew." She stood up facing him.

There was a moment's silence.

"Andrew," she began.

"Well?"

" I've treated you badly. I can see it now."

He stood quite still, looking away from her towards the door. Was it indifference? Or to avenge the past was he abstaining purposely from helping her out. These questions presented themselves to her, but she brushed them on one side and continued, " If you *had* taken Madame Zorewski with you to Paris, it wouldn't have been surprising."

" Ah ! " he ejaculated.

" Yes, Andrew, it wasn't that I blamed you exactly —it was something quite different."

" What was different ? "

" I mean the reason for my being so—upset."

He was listening intently, still with his eyes on the door. If it were possible to have associated shyness with Andrew, she might have ascribed his attitude to that feeling.

" Then what *was* the reason ? " His eyes were on her now, curiously, and with something self-conscious in their glance.

" Jealousy ! " She got out the word in defiance of the self which had stood on its dignity so long.

" *You—jealous !* "

Another silence. The flames purred on the hearth, and the clock in the hall made confidential comments to the irresponsive void of the night.

" Well ? " and he held out his arms smilingly.

She glanced at him. It was the old Andrew who lightly gave and lightly took. She had seen just that look on his face sometimes when the child asked him for a box of chocolates or a toy. Her pride raised its head again and she hesitated.

He pulled her to him. " Josephine," he began, " were you quite honest in all you've been saying ? "

"Quite honest, Andrew."

"And you spoke the truth when you admitted being jealous?"

"Yes, I spoke the truth."

"Why were you jealous?" He took her face between his hands and stared into her eyes.

As he stared he saw the tears rise and overflow.

"Why were you jealous?" he persisted, and he put his cheek against her wet one.

"Because I wanted you, myself."

"Well, you could have had me for the asking—you knew that."

"I knew that, but, don't you understand, I wanted your love—to have you—without your love—oh, you *must* understand!"

"I'm trying, I really am, dear," and taking his handkerchief from his pocket he wiped her eyes. Then he seated himself in the arm-chair and pulling her down on his knees said, "Now tell me all about it." She was reminded again of his manner with Mignon, and the confession she had pictured herself making with dignity was worded as incoherently as Mignon herself might have recounted her troubles with a broken doll.

'Silly old thing!" and he rocked her to and fro. "D'you suppose *you* were the only person to suffer? Didn't it occur to you that *I* had my bad moments?"

She sat back putting her hands on his shoulders. "Did you, Andrew, oh, did you?"

"Yes," he said retrospectively. "I used to feel pretty lonely at times."

"But you found—distractions."

"I did, because I don't believe in crying after the moon. I'm not made for tragedy."

"Except once," she reminded him—"Mignonette."

"Ah, that was different."

"Yes, 'different,' because you *loved* her."

"Mignonette was Mignonette, you are you," he said conclusively. "One loves different people in different ways, and the people themselves are responsible for the kind of love they inspire."

She pondered the remark. "So you do——" she was beginning when he caught her to him and silenced her lips with the close, long pressure of his own.

They drew apart, staring into each other's eyes. It was the old Andrew, and the old Josephine—the two who had answered the call of passion in those days when youth goes to youth in the glamour of adolescence—only now they entered that past again, "through another gate."

EPILOGUE

ERASMUS put out his hand, and taking a little brass crocodile from his writing table placed it on the arm of his chair.

He was busy thinking, and the crocodile, which was his favourite paper-weight, was associated with the solving of problems.

He had seen Josephine and she had told him that the breach between herself and her husband was healed. Josephine said she owed this, in a large measure, to himself, and Erasmus was engaged on the conundrum of his own conduct. He had something like contempt for Andrew, and he loved Josephine, yet he had done his best to bring the two together.

He placed the brass crocodile on the sleeve of his coat, and holding out his arm looked absently at the grotesque little beast. "Such an act might place me on a pedestal of saintliness," he meditated with a grim smile. "I wonder why I did it?" He put the crocodile back and filling his pipe, lit it, and gave himself up to reverie.

The situation between Andrew and Josephine appealed to Erasmus's subtle and ironic turn of mind. It was, he thought, the kind of situation one would expect in a world as unsatisfactory as it was inconsistent.

Josephine, dodging the problem, had said, "I

know you don't approve of Andrew, I don't exactly approve of him myself, but I took him, for better or worse, I love him, and he's *my man*."

Why should Andrew be Josephine's man? Why did Josephine prefer Andrew, the wanderer, to one who would have given her the single-hearted devotion of a lifetime? Why are the stupid people loved more than the wise, the silly more than the sane?

Did he, Erasmus, love Josephine because she was not for him, and did Josephine, in her turn, love Andrew because Andrew had not sought her? Futile questions which kept him sitting solitary over the fire till the early hours of morning. Yet, strangely enough, in his preoccupation with such enigmas he found a certain relief from the ache of his loss. He got up at last, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and switched off the light. After all, life without riddles would be pretty tame, he reflected, as he mounted the stairs to his room. "When Pandora let loose her swarm of troubles over the world, kindly Fate must have provided 'the conundrum' as a panacea." And with this philosophic summing up of the problem Erasmus went to bed.

THE END

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